

“Apostolic Ministry and the US Assemblies of God
by Paul Grabill

From the view of Pentecostal Christians, the beginning of the twenty-first century is undoubtedly the most exciting time for followers of Jesus Christ since the earliest days of Christianity. Every year across the world, millions of people are coming to a full gospel experience with the Risen Lord of both salvation and Spirit baptism. Reports of signs and wonders now come from virtually every missions frontier around the globe.

It is also a new day in the established church world. Never before in the Western World has there been such openness across denominational lines to the supernatural Gifts of the Spirit. In the past century the perspective within the evangelical world on whether the supernatural gifts of 1 Corinthians 12-14 ceased at the end of the New Testament era (a teaching called cessationism) has done almost a complete turnaround. Where it would have been difficult at the beginning of the last century to find a respected New Testament theologian who was not a cessationist, it is almost equally difficult at the beginning of this new century to find one who is.

Pentecostals, by definition, have always been restorationists, not cessationists. Not only have we always believed that the supernatural element of Christianity should continue today, but we further believe that the basic pattern and life of the New Testament Church is normative for today. We do believe that New Testament power is linked to New Testament patterns—of holiness, fervent prayer, love, unity, indeed, all expressions of the Spirit-led Body of Christ. While much of the New Testament dynamic has been minimized over the centuries, we believe it is being recovered in these Last Days, and we desire to be a part of all that God wishes to restore to His Church.

The “Apostolic” Church

With the unparalleled acceptance of Pentecostalism, numerous challenges face classical Pentecostals, and in particular, the Assemblies of God. Some of our brothers and sisters in Christ have challenged us that we have not gone far enough in our restorationism, specifically in the area of church government. They chide us that we have received new wine but have determined to retain old wineskins. They claim that we are not fully “apostolic.”

What exactly does it mean to be “apostolic?” This expression is loosely used today to represent a wide variety of things. Among other things, the term may be used to signify (1) church bodies that attempt to trace a succession of their clergy back to the original 12 apostles, (2) Oneness, or Jesus-Only, Pentecostal Churches who have used the term “Apostolic Faith” to designate their distinctive doctrines, (3) churches that claim God has raised up present-day apostles in their midst (“New Apostolic” and “Fivefold” churches), or (4) churches, including most Protestant groups, that claim to be apostolic because they teach what the apostles taught; that is, New Testament doctrine.¹

In fact, the term has been used so loosely and with such variety of meaning that, when pressed, virtually every Christian group or denomination from Roman Catholicism to independent charismatics would claim to be “apostolic.” Indeed, the Church as a whole should and must be apostolic! We have all been sent to a hurting and dying world.

Yet the use of the term “apostolic” that presents a burning question today in many places is whether or not there should be the full and formal recovery of recognized ministry offices corresponding to the ministry gifts of Ephesians 4:11, where we read, “It was He (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...” (NIV)

¹ Taken from “Apostles and Prophets,” U.S. Assemblies of God position paper (2001), p 2.

And so the question is often asked, “Is your ministry apostolic?,” meaning “Do you believe in the five-fold (some would say four-fold) ministry gifts of Ephesians 4?” And actually, since the ministries of evangelists, pastors and teachers are universally accepted today, the question becomes, “Do you believe in present day apostles and prophets?” To this question we should and must give careful response. For the purposes of this paper we will look only at the ministry of apostles. Before we seek to take a position on these important matters, we must first look at the scriptural and historical evidence regarding apostles.

Who were the New Testament Apostles?

It does not take one long in Sunday School to learn that Jesus named twelve men to serve as His apostles. They were identified as such early in His ministry and are known to the historian Luke (Acts 6:2) and to the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 15:5) as “the Twelve.” In Revelation 21:14, they are called, “the Apostles of the Lamb.”

What does it mean to be an “apostle?” The word means, “sent one” or “messenger.” The function of the twelve apostles (and the Church) was to “go and make disciples” (Matt. 28:20), but Jesus did not wait until His ascension to send them. In fact, they were “sent” as early as Matthew 10, Mark 6 and Luke 9. Christ was calling them to make disciples, even as He himself was making them disciples, for Jesus was an Apostle (Hebrews 3:1), sent by the Father.

To whom were the Twelve sent? Like the seventy, they were sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:6). They were to preach the Kingdom, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who had leprosy and drive out demons. (Matt. 10:7-8). This charge to the Twelve not only continues, but intensifies in the Book of Acts (1:8). We should note that along with the rest of the 120, the Twelve were sent to Jerusalem (Acts 1:4). Though they had spent some time with Christ in Jerusalem, yet this was missionary territory for them, since nearly all of them were Galileans, not

Judeans. This cross-cultural dimension is specifically raised in Acts 2:7 by the crowd who heard the 120 speaking in tongues. We might call this type of sending “home missions” today.

After one of the twelve, Judas, takes his life, Acts 1 records the selection of his replacement, Matthias. But this does not mean the end of the calling and naming of apostles. The best known of the “other” apostles is the Apostle Paul, who repeatedly insists on his direct commissioning from Christ himself (Rom 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1, Gal 1:1, 15f, Col. 1:1, etc.) and vigorously defends his apostleship in 2 Corinthians 10-11. In addition, there were Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor. 9:6), Adronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7), Apollos (1 Cor. 4:6,9), Titus (2 Cor. 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), and possibly Timothy and Silas (1 Thess. 2:6). The New Testament further deals with others, as the issue of those claiming to be true apostles, but found to be false (2 Cor. 11:13 and Rev. 2:2) becomes critical. These texts seem to indicate that there were many more than the twelve who were rightfully regarded as apostles (hence the need for “testing”), yet are all of the apostles the same? We would hold that they were (and are) not the same.

Like many Biblical scholars, we would make a distinction between the “apostles of Christ,” which would include the Twelve (sent to the Jews) plus Paul (sent to the Gentiles) and all others as the “apostles of the Church” (this specific phrase is used in 2 Cor. 8:23). The first group would have a foundational function in a universal and once-for-all sense (Ephesians 2:20; note the past tense of the verb, “built”²); the latter have a foundational ministry in a more localized and temporal sense.

² In fact, the use of the term “apostles” in Ephesians 3:5 as well as 2:20 seems to confirm that the emphasis in Ephesians is on the universal, once-for-all “Apostles of Christ.” At the time of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, there were no known apostles in Ephesus.

Therefore, the “apostles of Christ” is a closed group, but the “apostles of the Church” is open and continues today.³ We will revisit this distinction later.

The Special Case of the Apostle Paul

Because of the extensive record related to the Apostle Paul, we are able to see a unique situation unfold in the New Testament. Paul was both an apostle of Christ as well as an apostle of the Church, hence the cause for much confusion both in the New Testament Church as well as today.

Many scholars have debated whether the selection of Matthias in Acts 1 was truly Spirit-led, or whether God had ordained the vacancy of Judas to be reserved for the Apostle Paul. This legitimate inquiry will probably not be resolved until we reach eternity, but it is most interesting that we find the pattern of 12+1 in the Old Testament as well. Though both the Old and New Testaments speak of the Twelve Sons/Tribes of Israel, yet there were twelve with territory and one without (the priestly tribe of Levi). The sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manassah, are named as two territorial tribes.

This pattern is repeated in the New Testament with the Apostle Paul, who calls himself “one abnormally born” (1 Cor. 15:8). Obviously if other apostles (the apostles of the Church) fit the same category as Paul, then Paul would not have been as unique as he was.

At the same time that Paul equates his anointing and authority with that of the Twelve (see Gal. 1-2, especially his equating himself with Peter in Gal. 2:7-8 and opposing Peter in Gal. 2:14), he also calls himself the “least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9). Was Paul contradicting himself, or did he have a sense of his uniqueness? We believe the latter.

³ “No person today could be an apostle in the class with Jesus Christ. No person today could be an apostle in the class with the twelve apostles of the Lamb. No person today could be an apostle in the class with the apostle Paul. But thousands today could be and are in the...class with Barnabus...” R.E. McAlister, quoted in the paper, “Contemporary Apostles and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada,”(2003), p. 13.

Which of the two categories did Paul utilize in his defense? His appeal was always that he was an Apostle of Christ (see references above). For while Paul is sent out with Barnabas by the Church of Antioch (Acts 13:2-3), Paul always looked back to the Damascus Road experience and the Lord's appearance to him for his apostolic calling and authority, not to the Church's commissioning in Antioch. And though Barnabas had seniority in the faith, yet Paul was primary in the team of Paul and Barnabas. Some of the Twelve were sent by the Church at times (Acts 8:14), but these cases do not present the same dilemma as does Paul's.

So while, as we shall see, the marks of apostolic gifting in Paul are instructive to "apostles of the Church," yet no apostles today can equate their contemporary ministry with Paul's, along with the Twelve's, foundational and canonical anointing.

What Were the Biblical Marks of an Apostle?

The first, and most important, mark of a foundational "apostle of Christ" was that they had personally been with the Lord himself and a witness to His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22, 1 Cor. 9:1, 15:7-8). This was essential for the Early Church, because with the Lord's physical departure, it was the apostles who established the norm of doctrine and fellowship in the New Testament Church. This mark can only apply to foundational apostles, not contemporary. Though all of us should be known as those who have been with Christ, yet none today can be literal witnesses of the Resurrected Savior. This privilege was given for a short time, and only to a limited number (1 Cor. 15: 6-7). The appearance itself did not make all apostles (for example, the rest of the five hundred and James), but notice that Paul says that Christ appeared "last of all to me also..." Last means last.

Other marks of apostleship apply to both categories of apostles. Two that immediately rise from the New Testament text are missional and relational. The first is true by definition. Apostles

are sent. Paul often cited his mission as being one sent to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21, 26:17, Romans 11:13, 15:16, 1 Tim. 1:11). Church tradition tells us of many missionary journeys by Peter, Thomas and other apostles. Can this missional mark be applied to contemporary “sent ones?” Of course. The church is and must always be missional. In fact, the word “missionary” comes from the Latin word for “apostle.” Missions is one of the core reasons for the founding of the Assemblies of God.

The relational mark of apostleship that is so evident in the New Testament is linked to the missional call of the apostles. As we look later at the issue of apostolic authority, we are struck by the appeal to relationship and “fathering/parenting” (1 Cor. 4:15 and 2 Cor. 14:15). Even in 2 Cor. 12:12, where Paul cites the work of the supernatural in his apostolic call, we note that he says that his ministry was exercised with much patience (KJV) or perseverance (NIV). To the Thessalonians, Paul reminds them that he loved and cared for them gently, as “a mother caring for her little children.” (1 Thess. 2:7). For the Corinthians, he is “jealous...with a godly jealousy” (1 Cor. 11:2).

Just as parenting requires great patience and suffering, so does apostolic foundation-laying in a place where there has been no gospel preached before (see 2 Cor. 11:23-28). One cannot expect from infants what one should rightfully expect from adults. Responsibility cannot be delegated to infants in the faith; they need time to grow and mature. The apostles did much more than a single day or week of meetings; they gave time and effort, even taking up residence, to lay a sure foundation for the church of that particular city.

Apostolic authority and apostolic relationship go hand in hand. For though Paul had the same universal authority as the Twelve (and did write to city churches he had not visited), yet he practically apologizes to the Roman believers for the boldness with which he characterized his letter to them (Rom. 15:15). His greatest satisfaction in ministry was not in exercising authority in a general sense, but came from the churches that he himself had founded (2 Cor. 3:2, 10:16, 1 Thess. 2:20, Phil. 4:1, etc.). For though Paul was often bold in his ministry, yet he exercises incredible

humility and gentleness (2 Cor. 10:1). For any that might deem themselves to be contemporary apostles, they should measure the status of their ministry by 1 Cor. 4:8-13. Apostles are not “kings,” but the “scum of the earth,” according to Paul. It is not a position of earthly honor.

A last mark that easily can be lost is the supernatural dynamic of apostolic ministry. Not only do we see this in the commission of Matthew 10:8, but Paul clearly states in 2 Corinthians 12:12 that signs, wonders and miracles are part of apostolic ministry. In 1 Cor. 2:4-5, Paul cites the demonstration of the Spirit’s power as critical to the foundation of the Church of Corinth. Does this mean that all that are used in miraculous ways are apostles? No, for 1 Corinthians 12:11 tells us that various supernatural gifts are given “as the Spirit determines.” Indeed, in Acts the Spirit uses Philip, the evangelist (Acts 8; 21:8), in supernatural ministry. As Pentecostals, we embrace this mark as part of signifying true apostolic ministry, both for the foundational New Testament apostles as well as for contemporary apostles.

What Was the Extent of Their Authority?

Since the term apostle is being used by many today in the sense of ruling, or government, it is important that we examine the Biblical record of the exercise of apostolic authority.

As we have mentioned, the authority of the apostles came more from relationships than “office.” Of course, this was true with Jesus, who could have begun his ministry with His disciples by explaining His divine stature but did not. It is not until long after His death that the Church began to fully comprehend the dimensions of His grandeur. As the Chief Apostle (Heb. 3:1), Jesus modeled extraordinary humility and patience for His apostles. In Philippians 2 we read that Jesus did not grasp after honor, even as contemporary apostles should not. Moreover, he taught the disciples that they (and we) should not be as the Gentiles, who exercise authority as lords. Rather

the first among the disciples should become a servant of all (Matt. 20:20-28). Hence many of the New Testament apostles preferred the term “servant” to any other ministry description.

Another striking feature of the New Testament record is the eagerness of the Twelve to share their authority with others. The Twelve had the entire Church of Jerusalem select the Seven in Acts 6, and in Acts 15 the Jerusalem Council consists of many elders as well as apostles. Furthermore, one might have expected Peter to render the ruling at that first Council, but it was James, the Pastor of the Church of Jerusalem, who did so. Some count James, the brother of Jesus, as an apostle, but careful reading of the relevant texts (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19, 2:9) does not so indicate.

Since apostles, by definition, were mobile, local rule in the maturing churches was exercised by elders. Philippians is written to the bishops and deacons (1:1), not to a “City Apostle.” The intriguing chapters of Revelation 2-4 have letters written to “angels.” The Greek word here can be translated “messenger” just like the word for “apostle,” but there is insufficient evidence, nor is there New Testament precedent elsewhere to regard the recipients as “City Apostles.”

Apostles, like all of the ministry gifts of Ephesians 4, were focused on equipping the saints, not focusing on their own authority or “office.” Certainly there is no sense of office when Paul and Barnabas are commissioned in Acts 13:2. This is not to say that there were not hierarchal offices in the New Testament Church (elders and deacons in particular), but apostles were always seen as having dynamic, not static, authority. As the Church after the New Testament became more and more hierarchal and less and less charismatic, one notes the virtual total absence of apostles, unless as we look back we choose to regard missionaries, such as Patrick of Ireland, as apostles. Regardless, apostles were never self-commissioned (2 Cor. 10:17). There was no room for ministry rogues in the Early Church.

If apostleship was not about governmental authority, one might ask, why then did Paul exercise authority so directly in 1 Corinthians and defend his apostleship so vigorously in 2 Corinthians? Here again we see the role of relationship. False apostles were seeking to minimize the authority that Paul had established with the Corinthians by relationship. It was the equivalent of someone trying to supplant rightful parents. Parents have authority simply by virtue of being parents. And as their father in the faith, he was righteously jealous and deeply concerned for their welfare. As the Church initially developed, authority became more and more localized, as localized authority was based on localized relationship.

But, one may ask, were not the Twelve promised by Jesus that they would reign with Him? Yes, but the promise of Matthew 19:28 seems to indicate that the authority reserved for the foundational Twelve has yet to be exercised. It is part of the “not yet” element of the Kingdom that has begun to come. Indeed, in Revelation 21:14, the names of the Twelve are inscribed on the wall of the city. Where? In the foundation, of course.

A twelve-membered “Council of Apostles” that some would seek to perpetuate today is apparently irrelevant, if not non-existent, throughout most of the New Testament. One should note that while Matthias replaced Judas in Acts 1, there is no replacement made for James in Acts 12. There was no need to maintain the number of apostles at twelve. Led by the Spirit, the early disciples discovered that such static, ruling structures are more akin to the Jewish Sanhedrin than to Christian polity. Servant leadership is for this time; ruling and reigning is for the consummation of the Kingdom.

What Is the Evidence From the Early Church Fathers?

Because of questions remaining regarding the gifts of apostles and prophets as well as the question of continuity of these gifts, it is helpful for us to look at evidence coming from the second

century Church, just years after the completion of the New Testament writings. Of course, these records are neither authoritative nor canonical, yet they inform us as to how those closest to the age of the foundational apostles viewed matters that we face as we seek New Testament restoration of the power and life of the Spirit.

One of the earliest post-New Testament writings, 1 Clement (42), confirms what we already know from the New Testament—that “Christ is from God and the Apostles are from Christ.” However, a statement is also made in the same passage relevant to the issue of “apostolic succession.” Following the New Testament example of appointing elders and deacons as local leaders (Acts 20:7; Titus 1:5), Clement asserts that while the Apostles went “preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons.”

The Didache (another second century writing), however, speaks of contemporary apostles, but, interestingly, seems to use the terms apostle and prophet interchangeably. In chapter 11, the unknown writer seems to address the concern of those using spiritual gifts for money or free food and shelter. The author writes, “But concerning the apostles and prophets, do so according to the ordinance of the Gospel. Let every apostle, when he comes to you, be received as the Lord; but he shall not abide more than a single day, or if there be need, a second likewise; but if he abide three days he is a false prophet. And when he departs, let the apostle receive nothing except bread, until he finds shelter. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet....not everyone that speaks in the Spirit is a prophet, but only if he has the ways of the Lord.”

Even less helpful is the Shepherd of Hermas (S. 9. 15), where it speaks of “forty apostles and teachers of the preaching of the Son of God,” who like two other categories of leaders follow the “ten that were placed in the foundations...the first generation...”

The Spirit, Missions and the New Testament Flow of Church Authority

As we have noted above, as early as Acts 20, the pattern for local church government after the initial apostolic mission was complete was to appoint elders, not junior apostles and prophets. In the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), there is much discussion regarding local church government (bishops/elders/pastors and deacons), but there is no mention of a need for continuing apostles and prophets where the Church has already been set in order. This does not mean that the foundational apostles had no further contact with the Churches they established, but it does mean that the lack of an apostle in the city was seen as normal for a maturing City Church.

Pentecostals have always instinctively, if not deliberately, recognized the decentralized flow of the Spirit and authority in the New Testament. This in seminal form is the promise of Acts 1:8. While John 20:22 records that Jesus breathes on the disciples, saying “Receive the Holy Spirit,” it is not until the Day of Pentecost that the full community of 120 believers receives the full measure of the Spirit. But it does not stop with them. Within hours, Peter is saying to the crowd gathered, “This promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

The rest of Acts records the proliferation of the Spirit’s power and work. In Acts 10, Gentiles are included for the first time. In Acts 11, the Church of Antioch is established. This is important, for after not many years, the Church of Antioch supplants the Church of Jerusalem as the most strategic and missionary-sending church of its time. For the New Testament Church, there is no enduring geographical center with an enduring “Apostolic Council”—not Jerusalem, not Antioch, not Ephesus, and not Rome. In fact, there is no record of any permanent, resident council of apostles at all outside of the short, foundational beginnings in Jerusalem.

One of the unfortunate things we learn from church history is that human nature gradually took over and quenched the work of the Spirit. Rather than continuing to outwardly focus on

missions and evangelism through the power of the Spirit, human power became inwardly focused and centralized, with ultimately the Church of Rome being regarded as a New Jerusalem. The great church father, Tertullian, had to choose between the stale, hierarchal church of Rome and the vibrant, but somewhat heretical sect of Montanus. Though we do not endorse the many aberrations of the Montanists, yet we can sympathize with Tertullian in his choice to join what might have been seen as the “fringe Pentecostals” of his time. May we never become so stale that reasoned believers like Tertullian would feel they must fellowship elsewhere.

While always wanting to guard the flock of God in areas of doctrine and practice, the Assemblies of God has always committed itself to maximum freedom and congregational autonomy, both in North America and in our indigenous missions philosophy. The Spirit is for all, not for a few select, ruling apostles and prophets who issue oracles to a national or worldwide constituency. The promise that the Spirit will guide us into all truth (John 16:13) is for every congregation and every believer.

Continuity of Apostolic “Offices”

This second century evidence squares with New Testament evidence that while (1) there were apostles beyond the “Apostles of Christ,” yet (2) the Apostles did not see the need to appoint apprentice apostles for the sake of continuity. Again, Paul appointed elders in Ephesus and told Titus to appoint elders in every city. As the Church spread throughout the Roman world, we do not see “apostles of the city,” but rather bishops of the city church. Many of the early church fathers were prominent city bishops. Of course, there were no denominations in the New Testament or in the centuries after. Such was strictly forbidden by 1 Cor. 1 and 3.

So, in view of the Biblical pattern and historical evidence, in what ways might we properly speak of the restoration of the gifts of Ephesians 4:11?

*First, we must question the necessity of formal apostolic “offices.”*⁴ Certainly we see in the New Testament people who are recognized as called and gifted in various ways, but the seeming interchangeability of labels (pastor, elder, bishop) as well as the lack of a canonical “book of order” causes us to support a more dynamic view of Spirit-led church government. Order should grow out of gifting, servanthood and relationships. Titles without gifting have been the bane of the Church throughout the centuries. Should the Church of Jesus Christ not have offices? Yes, the organism must have organization to live, but the authentic and tested flow of the Spirit must transcend our best attempts at temporal structures. There will always be a healthy tension between order and Spirit, but both are necessary (1 Cor. 14: 39-40). But from what we observe in Scripture, it is most unlikely that any contemporary apostles would hold elective or titular office, for the dynamic of apostleship conflicts with the impulse to poll and to please. Should we (as we do) have offices of evangelists, pastors and teachers? Possibly so, but we have often clouded our understanding in such a way as to restrict those Ephesians 4:11 gifts to those who held formal offices. We have often overlooked that many who sit in the pews of our congregations are gifted in evangelistic, pastoral or teaching gifts. Furthermore, because of our current focus on formal offices, we have probably been guilty of misidentifying the ministry giftings of many. Some “pastors” are actually evangelists or prophets; some “evangelists” are itinerant teachers or prophets.

Second, we believe that the authentic contemporary function of apostle needs to be rekindled, nurtured and recognized. Many missionaries and missionary evangelists are actually contemporary apostles. While some missionaries are sent by the Church to serve in various administrative and support roles, yet many today reflect the marks of New Testament apostles, going to unreached people groups, patiently ministering the gospel of the Kingdom with

⁴ “Whether or not the movement ever uses the term ‘apostle’ is of little consequence; however, the function of apostolic ministry has and continues to be essential.” Ron Johnson in paper, “A Blueprint for Change: Rediscovering the Apostolic Model of Church Multiplication” (2002)

supernatural signs and wonders, leaving new and strong congregations of believers with trained and capable leadership as their legacy. We have no doubt that God is still calling “Apostles of the Church” to places of great need of the gospel (including one of the largest unevangelized nations in the world--the United States of America!). Though they are “Apostles of the Church,” yet their call ultimately (as it does for all of us) comes from the Lord. Is there any problem with someone saying, “God called me to India,” or “God called me to Philadelphia?” Not at all. Such legitimate commissions from the Lord by His Spirit should be recognized and supported.

Third, there is certainly no Biblical warrant for a local congregation to feel it necessary to have all the gifts of Ephesians 4:11 operative as recognized offices in their Body to be an authentic New Testament congregation. While all the giftings should be reflected in some way in every local body (such as supporting missions to unreached peoples), this teaching misunderstands that each local congregation is only part of the church of the city and not an isolated and self-sufficient entity unto themselves. This incorrect teaching would promote apostles of Apollos, apostles of Cephas, et al. in each community, thus perpetuating the current division in the Body of Christ.

Fourth, the teaching that there are apostles among already-reached people groups is problematic as to definition and delicate as to application. Are there apostles where the gospel has been previously preached, such as is the case in most of North America? Based on the Biblical evidence, we cannot answer this definitively, but can confidently say that if there are, they are servants leading a fresh wave of the Spirit and encountering the forces of the enemy so to advance the Kingdom into territory previously untouched or in new dimensions of restoration. But they are leading as servants, not as hierarchal officers. They would also be healers and not dividers, as 1 Corinthians 1 and 3 would again confirm. Much has been made by some of the order given in 1 Corinthians 12:28, “And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third

teachers, then workers of miracles...” But even if this passage has contemporary application, the authority is lateral and dynamic, not hierarchal and static.

Fifth, who might be said to be operating in the “apostolic”—the sender or the sendee?

There appears to be confusion regarding this, due to the fact that missionaries are almost universally accepted as contemporary apostles—their calling, passion, anointing are recognized by the Church even as they are commissioned and sent out. In this case, the whole Church is “operating in the apostolic,” sending and being sent. But since missions cannot be defined by salt water, how does this work in a place such as the United States? We believe that an apostolic leader who meets the definition agreed upon in the Branson Summit; who is passionately committed to church planting, and like Paul and Titus, raises up elders and appoints them to oversee new congregations can certainly be seen as operating in the apostolic, even if the title “apostle” is best not applied to them. While such a function requires mobility (in order to visit planted congregations), yet such a person might still be referred to as pastor if they work from a mother congregation as their base of operation. We believe it is essential that this apostolic function and relationships be recognized in order to release the giftings necessary to plant hundreds of new congregations in the U.S.

Last, we believe the process of public appointment (self or otherwise) of brothers and sisters who bear the specific titles of apostle is neither helpful to nor necessary for the Body of Christ.

Having a particular title is not necessary to one’s function. Jesus was the Messiah whether He was recognized as such or not. Much of His ministry was characterized by the “Messianic Secret,” admonishing many to whom He ministered to keep His role to themselves. It is better to wonder if some contemporary men and women of God are indeed contemporary apostles and prophets than to proliferate such titles in a manner that distances brethren and divides the Body, rather than mutually edifying and building up the Body. No matter how greatly gifted one might be, we must be as Paul, who said, “We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for

Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5, see also 2 Cor. 10:18). True apostles may not be regarded as such until the fruit of their ministry is assessed over a long period of time. We must look with more than a bit of skepticism on those ministries that advertise themselves as having a "breakthrough anointing," necessitating bringing them personally to your community for a day or two in order to see a spiritual breakthrough. What is needed in the exercise of all ministry gifts, including evangelist, pastor and teacher, is a servant's heart, with a lack of any sense of striving or self-promotion. There are none of us greater than our Master.

Theological Conclusion

The Latter Rain movement of 1948-49 was deeply divisive to Pentecostals. People who sincerely wanted to be used by God in a greater way were quickly anointed as "apostles" by leaders of the movement. Many of these returned to their home congregation to inform their pastor that he or she must now come under the authority of the new "apostle." True apostleship is no direct threat to an existing hierarchy, for the two have an entirely different character. Since true apostles are gentle and supreme examples of servanthood, they do not wish to supplant or to rule. Rather, they desire to expand and extend. While many Pentecostals today regard such twentieth-century figures as Smith Wigglesworth (whom some have called an "Apostle of Faith"), Donald Gee ("Apostle of Balance") and other missionary giants, such as Mark Buntain, as apostles, their authority was not from their "office," but from their calling and anointing.

The Body of Christ is still in the process of restoration. We believe that process has accelerated in this past century, but there are always dangers and pitfalls. Any teaching that brings further division in the Body of Christ must be examined very carefully. As Pentecostals, we seek to serve the rest of the Body of Christ, not separate ourselves from nor lord it over true brothers or sisters in Christ.

All of the gifts of the New Testament Church, including those of Ephesians 4:11, are for the Body of Christ for all time. But the focus should not just be on the ascension gifts of Ephesians 4, but also the spiritual gifts of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 as well. They are all alive and well in the Body today. Five-fold gifts become manifold gifts. We encourage all believers, led and filled by the Spirit, to allow themselves to be fully utilized as servants of the Lord, since all gifts are needed to edify and complete the Body as well as to mobilize the Body to reach the world. Then the purpose of the five ascension gifts will be realized—“to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity of the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:12-16).