

IDENTIFYING APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY: A SYNTHESIS OF VIEWPOINTS

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The apostolic nature of the Christian faith has been appealed to as the basis by which a multiplicity of ecclesiastical, ecumenical, theological and missiological agendas is justified. Although these various agendas are legion and the process of isolating and analyzing them individually would be insurmountable, their respective emphases can be summarily categorized. Some scholars emphasize apostolicity as a means of establishing the institutional authority of the Church.¹ For the purposes of this study, such an emphasis will be termed "ecclesial apostolicity." Other scholars look to the apostolic character of the Church in order to identify a norm by which the legitimacy of subsequent accretions is determined.² With this emphasis particular appeal is made to the Bible, especially to the NT. Thus a fitting term for this line of inquiry is "Biblical apostolicity." Still others understand the apostolic nature of the Church to be bound up in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Thus regarded, apostleship is a *charisma* of the Spirit that is as much a part of today's Church as it was in the first century.³ This emphasis will be called "pneumatic apostolicity." A related and

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¹ Cf A Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession in the First Two Centuries of the Church* (London Lutterworth, 1953), *The Apostolic Ministry* (Edinburgh Oliver and Boyd, 1958), *The Apostolic Ministry Essays on the History and Doctrine of Episcopacy* (ed K E Kirk, London Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), A G Herbert, *Apostle and Bishop A Study of the Gospel, the Ministry and the Church-Community* (New York Seabury, 1963), J N Geldenhuys, *Supreme Authority* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1953), J H Newman, *An Essay on The Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame University of Notre Dame, 1989), P Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York Scribner's, 1903-12), vols 1-3, K S Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity Vol 1 The First Five Centuries* (New York/London Harper, 1937), P K Mathew, "Church Government in the New Testament," *Communio Viatorum* 24/3 (1981) 165-178, W Loeser, "Apostolische Kirche," *Die romisch katholische Kirche* (1986) 88-96

² Cf K H Rengstorf, "apostolos," *TDNT* 1 407-447, B Caird, *The Apostolic Age* (London Duckworth, 1955), R Bruce, *Apostolic Order and Unity* (Edinburgh T and T Clark, 1903), B F Lawrence, *The Apostolic Faith Restored* (St Louis Gospel Publishing, 1916), L Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times* (Grand Rapids Baker, 1977), *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation Essays in Honor of Otto A Piper* (ed W Klassen and G F Snyder, New York Harper, 1962), J W McClendon, Jr, *Systematic Theology Ethics* (Nashville Abingdon, 1986), J H Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame University of Notre Dame, 1984), E F Harrison, *The Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1985), M C Griffiths, "Today's Missionary, Yesterday's Apostle," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 21/2 (April 1985) 154-165, J G Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (Grand Rapids Baker, 1965)

³ Cf A Bitlinger, *Gifts and Ministries* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1973), G W Bromley, *Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1959), E Kasemann, "Ministry and Community in

yet distinct emphasis sees the Church's apostolic character actualized in the faithful carrying out of its mission.⁴ Hence the designation "kerygmatic apostolicity" seems fitting.

What will be demonstrated in this study is that, while a firm grasp of the subject can be achieved as the respective emphases are examined, unless each particular emphasis is allowed to inform the other emphases from which it is distinguished the path to understanding the apostolic character of postmodern Christianity remains obstructed. Each view is commendable in its own right but is incomplete. Nor are they mutually exclusive. The burden of this study, then, is to take a fair sampling of what scholarship in each camp has said concerning apostolicity and, after critically interacting with this material, demonstrate the points at which each emphasis logically converges with the groups that have approached the subject differently. From this line of inquiry will come the delineation of several characteristics by which the Church's apostolic nature can be identified amid the pluralism of today's Christian scene.

1. ECCLESIAL APOSTOLICITY

Before the days of Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, arguments in favor of apostolic succession were considered by proponents of successionist sacerdotalism to be virtually unnecessary.⁵ Rengstorf's cogent explication of the apostolate on the basis of his *šāliḥ* theory became the standard with which all viewpoints had to reckon. A summary of Rengstorf's position is in order.

the New Testament," *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London SCM, 1964), G T Sheppard, "Pentecostals and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism The Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship," *Pneuma* 6 (1984) 5-33, L W Caldwell, *Sent Out! Reclaiming the Spiritual Gift of Apostleship for Missionaries and Churches Today* (Pasadena William Carey, 1992), G Walker, *Twentieth Century Apostleship* (Mt Hermon Conciliar), J E Young, "That Some Should Be Apostles," *EvQ* 48 (April-June 1976) 96-104

⁴ J Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (New York/Hagerstown/San Francisco/London Harper, 1977), W Pannenberg, *The Church* (Philadelphia Westminster, 1983), H D McDonald, "Apostolic Preaching True Apostolic Succession Takes Place When the Word of God is Preached in the Power of the Spirit," *Christianity Today* (February 8, 1980) 35-36, R Anderson, *The Praxis of Pentecost* (Pasadena Fuller Seminary, 1991), J Blaw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (New York McGraw-Hill, 1962), E P Clowney, "The Church and Its Mission," *Applying the Scriptures* (ed K Kantzer, 1987) 97-122, T Fitzgerald, "An Orthodox-Catholic Statement on Apostolicity Boston 1986," *Sobornost* 9/2 (1987) 46-52, A F Blakley, "Degree on the Apostolate of Lay People, Apostolicam Actuositatem," *Vatican II and Its Documents* (ed T O'Connell, 1986) 141-157, C Dorsey, "Paul's Use of *apostolos*," *ResQ* 28/4 (1985-86) 193-200, E B Kihwa, "Lay Apostolate—Christ's Command," *African Ecclesial Review* 28 (June-August 1986) 143-148, J Kupka, "Das Laienapostolat in der Diskussion," *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift "Communitio"* 14/5 (1985) 407-417

⁵ Bruce, *Apostolic Order* 30, provides the following definition of successionist sacerdotalism "By sacerdotalism is meant the dogma that our Lord instituted in His Church a sacerdotal class of sacrificing priests who can, like the Aaronic priest, trace their descent by a regular line of spiritual ancestors through the apostles to the great High Priest, Jesus Christ"

Since *apostolos* in classical Greek and Hellenism was one of a number of unique terms bound up with both seafaring and military expeditions, Rengstorf argues that the NT use is more likely drawn from the Hebrew term *šāliah* ("one sent"). He believes that by the first century the legal institution of the *šēlūhîm* was well in place. The word *šāliah* was a legal rather than religious term describing a person who was a commissioned representative of the one who commissioned him, representing "in his own person the person and rights of the other." The *šāliah* possessed authority as a commissioned representative but did not have the power to pass on his commission to another. Although the term itself is found only in first-century rabbinic Judaism, and even though Jewish missionaries were never referred to as *šēlūhîm*, Rengstorf reasons that the correspondence is too close not to admit that this was the probable technical background to the word "apostle."

He asserts that *apostolos* in the NT, like the *šāliah*, denotes the commissioned representative whose identity as one sent is determined more by the task to be carried out than by a particular status that the commissioning itself may imply. Accordingly one's function as a *šāliah* came to an end when the commission was fulfilled. In light of the conceptual relationship between *šāliah* and *apostolos*, Rengstorf reasons that "it is only logical that the apostolate should be limited to the first generation and should not become an ecclesiastical office."⁶

It is evident from this summary that Rengstorf's *šāliah* theory argues against ecclesial apostolicity. Arnold Ehrhardt is right to contend that the "discarding of the *shaliach* hypothesis is in fact of great importance for the doctrine of the Apostolic succession." In divorcing his defense of successionism from the *šāliah* theory Ehrhardt embraces a traditional view of ecclesial apostolicity. But his polemic is focused more on Kirk's adaptation of Rengstorf's theory than on the trenchant points of the theory itself. In the end he proves why the *šāliah* theory cannot support successionism while offering little to disprove it.⁷

A more persuasive rebuttal to the *šāliah* theory comes from a scholar who is not a proponent of ecclesial apostolicity, J. Andrew Kirk. After citing a company of scholars in support of the statement that Rengstorf's theory lacks both concrete evidence and intrinsic probability, Kirk proceeds to assert that "neither the word nor the function of an *apostolos Christou Iēsou* can strictly be derived from *shaliach* nor can its meaning be constrained by the sense in which it might have been used in first-century Judaism." He believes that its characteristic use in the NT has a uniquely Christian origin and emphasis: "Like many other words which occur in contemporary literature, its characteristic meaning in the New Testament is quite unique." And while the NT exhibits no uniform concept of *apostolos* the distinctions that exist are founded upon an underlying unity: "the unity of the special call of Christ and the one apostolic mission." The

⁶ Rengstorf, "apostolos" 407–447.

⁷ Ehrhardt, *Apostolic Succession* 17–20.

differences that exist, therefore, may be adduced from the distinctive timing and form of the apostolic call.⁸

In offsetting the implications of Rengstorf's *šāliḥ* theory Kirk's insights bring to the fore a question that must be asked of ecclesial apostolicity: Is the doctrine of apostolic succession founded on the apostles and their teaching, or was it a later accretion that came into existence for reasons of expediency and subsequently defended by reading back into the apostolic age the ecclesiastical conditions which obtained in the second and third centuries?

Ehrhardt speaks for most constituents of ecclesial apostolicity when he insists that successionism is present in the NT even if the terminology is not. He begins his inquiry at the end of the fourth century when Jerome translated the *Canon* of Eusebius into Latin and works backward to the first half of the third century when Africanus and Hippolytus composed their *Chronicles* from which Eusebius himself drew. From there the search is pressed further back to the sources of Hippolytus and Africanus. When Christian sources fade out by the latter half of the second century Ehrhardt appeals to Jewish material in an effort to span the eighty-year gap that remains to be closed. With all his enthusiasm for the project, however, the dearth of second-century evidence in support of his view evokes a disheartened response: "Not only is the Didache silent, but Ignatius also, despite his fervent zeal for mon-episcopacy. Silent is Polycarp; while still more significant is the silence of Hermas, the other Roman among these early Fathers."⁹ Clearly, the closer this argument is pressed to the first century the less support it has. As Wolfhart Pannenberg observes:

The concept of an unbroken succession in office beginning with the installation of successors by the apostles themselves is hard to defend on historic grounds, especially since interest in such a line of succession reaching back to the apostles cannot be documented much before the end of the second century.¹⁰

Thus the question: If successionism is as "apostolic" as elders and deacons, why such a paucity of early evidence? Absence of this evidence prompts the search for other factors that may have given rise to the progressive appeal to apostolic succession.

G. B. Caird notes that the latter half of the first century brought three changes that altered the configuration of the Church for all time: (1) the final break between Christianity and Judaism, (2) the beginning of persecution by Rome, and (3) the death of many who had been principal leaders in the early Church. He believes that "none had as great an impact as the disappearance of the generation which had seen and heard Jesus." The most obvious result of these changes was the prevalence of diversity (heresy), which in turn necessitated the appeal to an authoritative basis by which normative doctrine could be defended. "The death of the apostles

⁸ J. A. Kirk, "Apostleship Since Rengstorf: Towards a Synthesis," *NTS* 21 (1974-75) 249-264, esp. 251-254, 262-263.

⁹ Ehrhardt, *Apostolic Succession* 35-82, 77.

¹⁰ Pannenberg, *Church* 58.

and the prevalence of heresy and false prophecy meant that sooner or later the church would have to face the problem of church order, and in the later New Testament writings we find the first traces of an interest in this subject."¹¹

Nevertheless these perceived "first traces" are to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical developments that began taking shape in the second century. Caird observes that the "violence with which Ignatius states his case" for the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyters and deacons suggests that this was a new development that had been "vigorously opposed."¹² What is more striking, however, is what Ignatius omits from his apologetic. H. M. Gwatkin asserts:

So much the more significant is the absence of the one decisive argument which would have made all the rest superfluous. With all his urgency, he never says, Obey the bishop as the Lord ordained, or as the apostles command. . . . The continued silence of so earnest an advocate as Ignatius is a plain confession that he knows of no such command: and the ignorance of one who must have known the truth of the matter would seem decisive that no such command was given.¹³

Caird maintains that what is true of mon-episcopacy in general is necessarily true of the apostolic authority and succession of bishops as well. Ignatius' appeal to the authority of the bishop, along with subsequent appeals to the bishop's position of authority as successor to the apostles, is best understood as the expedient by which the early Church asserted its right to condemn divergent views in the absence of the apostles themselves. Harrison states the matter succinctly:

The theory of apostolic succession did not originate in the apostolic age. Not until late in the second century did lists of succession begin to be compiled. At this point it was useful to the church to make such a claim in order to combat heresy. Bishops came to be regarded as the custodians of the apostolic teaching and practice.¹⁴

Thus the answer to the question that was previously asked of ecclesial apostolicity appears to be in hand: In light of what has been observed, it seems that the doctrine of apostolic succession was not founded on the apostles or their teaching but was appealed to as the means of fortifying the Church's claim of apostolic authority in delineating doctrinal and behavioral norms. The doctrine was subsequently defended by reading back into the apostolic age the ecclesiastical conditions that obtained in the second and third centuries.

It is important, however, to distinguish whether such an accommodation is necessarily unapostolic. Pannenberg is correct in stating that the apostolic character of the Church can only be maintained when the time-

¹¹ Caird, *Apostolic Age* 142-143, 149

¹² *Ibid* 151-152

¹³ Quoted in *ibid* 154

¹⁴ Harrison, *Apostolic Church* 152 Ehrhardt himself is forced to acknowledge the role of heresy in precipitating the appeal to apostolic succession (*Apostolic Succession* 81)

less message of Christ is adapted to address the exigencies of each new generation.¹⁵ The problem with ecclesial apostolicity's development is located not so much in its adaptation of the message as in its departure from the spirit and essence of the message. It was the specific manner in which the postapostolic Church sought to validate the message of Christ amid the onslaught of heresy that constituted a departure from the apostolic way.

According to Leonhard Goppelt, as the Church passed out of the apostolic age there were two distinct ways in which it sought to stabilize its historical existence. The first way emphasized the proclamation of the word that was concretized in the sacraments and borne by the entire community through admonition, intercession and Church discipline. The second way, which predominated from the second century onward, instantiated a pedagogical system of repentance that, growing out of a natural-legal ethos, stabilized the Church office in order to normalize doctrine and check heresy. The second way cannot be said to arise out of the first, nor can it be seen to complete it. Rather, the first way is supplanted by the second. With the formalization of this shift, the

authoritative word which summoned one to obedience in faith was thus subordinated to the authority of a constitutionally established office, to the sacraments which functioned in a manner similar to the mystery religions, and to a system of repentance. They believed themselves to be directed to the institution by the Spirit, . . . yet they fitted the Spirit into the institution. The development of Early Catholicism was therefore also a "falling away."¹⁶

II. BIBLICAL APOSTOLICITY

It was at just this point that the Reformation under Luther stepped in and "broke through this system of repentance whose roots went back to Hermas, and the conception that baptism is merely a closed, historical act and that the repentance of the Christians was thus something else."¹⁷ Along with the late-medieval system of penance the Protestant Church rejected the teaching of apostolic authority through the Church office and stressed instead that the apostolic nature of the Church is actualized through the preaching of the gospel. Luther himself was not an architect of an ecclesiology but a protagonist of the gospel. He avoided questions of Church order and had little concern as to whether Church structures followed an episcopal or a congregational form. All of Luther's energies "were devoted with obsessive singlemindedness to the defence of the gospel of God's justification of the sinner."¹⁸ For Luther and the Reformers the "church is apostolic when it has this gospel, on biblical authority, as the

¹⁵ Pannenberg, *Church* 52-53

¹⁶ Goppelt, *Current Issues* 204, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic* 150 See also Pannenberg, *Church* 45-48

¹⁷ Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post Apostolic* 139

¹⁸ P D L Avis, "Luther's Theology of the Church," *Churchman* 97/2 (1983) 104

content of its proclamation and assurance for its faith."¹⁹ Karl Barth's comments on this subject comprise a fitting articulation of Biblical apostolicity:

The apostolic community means concretely the community which hears the apostolic witness of the New Testament, which implies that of the Old, and recognises and puts this witness into effect as the *source and norm* of its existence. The apostolic Church is the Church which accepts and reads the Scriptures in their specific character as the direct attestation of Jesus Christ alive yesterday and today. . . . The Church is apostolic . . . when it exists on the basis of Scripture and in conformity with it.²⁰

Barth's statement, however, begs the question of whether there exists an apostolic norm or essence to which the NT (and by implication the OT) calls believers of all succeeding generations to emulate and by which the Church is able to identify itself as distinctly apostolic. Put simply, does the NT contain a *sancta natura* that the Church in each new generation must embrace as the means to its apostolicity?

Luther himself had no desire to resurrect the primitive Christian Church as a norm for the Reformation. He decried Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt's attempts to model the Wittenberg church after a supposed apostolic pattern, announcing that such an approach "destroys faith, profanes the blood of Christ, blasphemes the gospel, and sets all that Christ has won for us at nought."²¹ For him the irreducible minimum was the gospel of justification by faith and its proclamation. Everything else was of secondary importance.

Huldreich Zwingli, on the other hand, believed that the Reformation had not gone far enough. He proclaimed that what had taken place in the Reformation movement up to that point was insufficient and argued for a return to the sources of the Christian faith in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, embodied in Scripture itself. The momentum created by these appeals moved Menno Simons and the radical Swiss Reformers beyond what Zwingli himself envisaged. Theirs was a concern not for reformation but for restoration.

What Menno Simons and his constituents had in common with Luther was their lack of emphasis on certain forms and structures of the apostolic Church. Quite unlike Luther, on the other hand, was their lack of concern for the theology of faith and grace that was so much a part of Reformation thought. Instead "the restoration of the Anabaptists was first and foremost an ethical, behavioral restoration" that was predicated on the life-changing effects of the gospel. This, for the anabaptists, was the apostolic norm to which the NT beckoned the faithful.²²

¹⁹ Anderson, *Praxis* 82.

²⁰ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4/1 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1962) 722 (italics mine).

²¹ M. Luther, "Against the Heavenly Prophets," *Luther's Works: American Edition* (ed. C. Bergendoff; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958) 40.90-91.

²² C. L. Allen and R. T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene: ACU, 1988) 130-131.

Returning to Goppelt's observation regarding the two competing ways in which the postapostolic Church sought to stabilize its historical existence, we may state fairly that the anabaptists' restoration took its shape around efforts to return to the "first way" that the fathers abandoned centuries earlier in their battles against heresy and that the Reformation had been successful in actualizing only in part. Rather than appealing to a constitutionally established office, to sacraments, or to a system of penance as a means of validating their existence in history, the anabaptists believed that such was only achieved through a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. They looked to the Scriptures as the source and norm of their existence, accepting and reading them "*in their specific character* as the direct attestation of Jesus Christ alive yesterday and today," as Barth expressed it. The anabaptists, therefore, manifested a way of reading the Bible that typifies the best of Biblical apostolicity.

This reading of Scripture is duplicated when the Bible is approached not so much as an historical document that spoke to a generation long past but as the living Word that speaks to the present. Mennonite scholar John Howard Yoder observes that with such an approach the appeal to origins "is not primitivism,²³ nor an effort to recapture some pristine purity. It is rather a 'looping back,' a glance over the shoulder to enable a midcourse correction, a rediscovery of something from the past whose pertinence was not seen before." The result is a

continuing series of new beginnings, similar in shape and spirit, as the objective historicity of Jesus and the apostles, mediated through the objectivity of Scripture, encounters both the constants and the variables of every age to call forth "restitutions" at once original . . . at once unpredictable.²⁴

Scripture thus read enables each generation to interpret its present in light of the Bible's past, to construe its identity "via narratives that are historically set in another time and place but display redemptive power here and now."²⁵ James W. McClendon, Jr., calls this way of reading Scripture "the baptist vision" (with a small *b*). He explains:

I call it a *vision*, a way of seeing. Because it appears first in the prophets of Israel, I call it *the prophetic vision*; because it appears in modern times among the so-called Anabaptists, I call it (omitting the pejorative 'Ana') *the baptist vision* and write that with a small *b*, analogous to small-*c* catholic and small-*p* protestant.²⁶

²³ Yoder's use of the term "primitivism" implies a Biblicism that is governed by a strict prescriptionist hermeneutic that tends to deny the validity of historical Christianity. But of R. T. Hughes' use of the term Primitivism for Hughes describes a situation in which "believers are not so much following a primal guide as if first times constitute a kind of sacred constitution, as they are actually living through or reenacting the strong events of first times with which they now fully identify" (*American Quest for the Primitive Church* [Urbana/Chicago University of Illinois, 1988] 6).

²⁴ Yoder, *Priestly* 69, 133-134.

²⁵ McClendon, *Systematic* 34.

²⁶ J. W. McClendon, "Primitive and Present: The Gathering Church," *Primitivism and Modernization* (ed. R. T. Hughes, Urbana/Chicago University of Illinois) 7 (italics his).

It is in this way that the believing community of the first generation was able to reach beyond its present existence and establish itself in history. Through this way of reading Scripture they found in Jesus and in others a model for living. They found in the apostolic *didachē* a pattern for their teaching. They found significant events by which to construe their own significant happenings (e.g. baptism construed as crossing the Reed Sea). "What should interest us in particular," says McClendon, "is that this was not a way to read Scripture, it was for them *the way*"²⁷. Hence reading the Scriptures "*in their specific character*" (as Barth put it) necessarily entails this way. The advantage of such an approach is that it maintains the Bible as the touchstone of apostolicity without making it the *terminus ad quem*. McClendon clarifies:

The Bible is in this sense the church's book: we are the people of that book. But by shifting the emphasis from mere biblicism to a vision that shows *how* the church sees itself as that people, we avoid any dogmatic biblicism which could substitute attention to the book for participation in the life. That shift seems small, the consequences, though, are momentous.²⁸

This way of reading Scripture is characteristic of the many "restitutions" (to use Yoder's terminology) called forth as the objective historicity of Jesus and the apostles, mediated through Scripture, encountered both the constants and the variables of their respective age. Richard T. Hughes observes, for example, that "while New England Puritans never lost the clear distinction between their own time and primal time, it is nonetheless clear that they viewed their wilderness enterprise as a dramatic reenactment of the biblical saga"²⁹. They did not look to first times as an infallible constitution but saw themselves rather as participants in the events of first times with which they fully identified.³⁰

III. PNEUMATIC AND KERYGMATIC APOSTOLICITY

The identification with first times leads very naturally into a search for the experiences that correspond to the Spirit and power of first times. If it is true that the significant events of first-century Christianity (and by analogy the significant events of God's people in the OT) legitimately function as the bases by which to construe significant happenings of the present, then it follows that the Church's apostolicity is achieved both through the way it looks at Scripture and the way in which it actualizes in its own existence the dynamic experiences of the world of Scripture.

²⁷ Ibid. 6 (italics his)

²⁸ McClendon, *Systematic* 32

²⁹ Hughes, *American Quest* 6

³⁰ McClendon, *Systematic* 38 "Now the baptist vision reminds us that the narrative the Bible reflects, the story of Israel, of Jesus, and of the church, is intimately related to the narrative we ourselves live. Thus that vision functions as a hermeneutic that relates our experience to the Scriptures, showing how the two are joined."

Ray S. Anderson, a proponent of kerygmatic apostolicity, sees the apostolic nature of the Church bound up in the Pentecost event. For him Pentecost is "an apostolic event since it constitutes the sending of the witnesses into the world to testify to the power and presence of the Kingdom of God." The Church discovers its apostolic nature as it allows itself to be drawn by the Spirit into its mission. For Anderson it is not a matter of the Church "pushing" the kingdom into the world through institutional or pragmatic strategies. Rather, "it is 'pulled' into the world as it follows the mission of the Spirit."³¹

Thus Pentecost serves as a significant event by which the present Church construes its own existence and thus actualizes its apostolicity. It is more than a way of reading Scripture. It is a way of entering into communion with the life-giving Spirit of Scripture: "The church is thus constantly being 're-created' through the mission of the Spirit. At the same time, it has historical and ecclesial continuity and universality through its participation in the person and mission of Christ Jesus through the Spirit."³² While it would be incorrect to look to Pentecost as the only significant event by which to construe the present, or the Church's participation with the Spirit in mission as the sole means to its apostolicity, it is safe to say that the Church cannot be apostolic without a sense of congruity with Pentecost and a concomitant sense of participation in the mission of the Spirit.

Other scholars believe that the apostolic character of the Church is to be found in the apostolic *charisma* of the Spirit. Herein lies the fine line of distinction between advocates of kerygmatic apostolicity and advocates of pneumatic apostolicity. Those who embrace pneumatic apostolicity believe that apostleship is a gift of the Holy Spirit that is as much a part of today's Church as it was in the first century. Michael C. Griffiths, for example, after acknowledging that there are those who believe that the gift of an apostle died out with the first generation, observes that Paul listed apostles first, followed by prophets and teachers (1 Cor 12:28). Since Paul later argued that one should earnestly desire the "higher gifts," Griffiths asks rhetorically whether such a view is consonant with Scripture: "Are we to believe that 'apostles' died out with the end of the first century apostolic generation?"³³

Similarly J. E. Young, after taking exception to Geldenhuys' argument that a distinction exists between the twelve as apostles "of the Lord" and the rest as apostles "of the churches," proceeds to assert that such an approach "ignores completely the work of the risen Christ and of the Spirit of God in the church." In light of Eph 4:11, Young argues, "I would emphasize . . . that apostleship is a gift of the ascended Christ. The apostle is not appointed by men any more than the pastor or teacher is. These are gifts mediated by the Holy Spirit of God, that carry the weight of the authority

³¹ Anderson, *Praxis* 86-87.

³² *Ibid.* 87.

³³ Griffiths, "Today's Missionary" 163.

of Christ." Christ may have initiated his work with the twelve whom he specifically chose, but he continues his work through others whom he calls and prepares through his Spirit. For Young the apostolic function corresponds to the missionary, "both past and present, who works towards the communication of the gospel in areas where it has not been heard or has not taken root, and the establishment of congregations."³⁴ This view is embraced by most advocates of pneumatic apostolicity. Unlike some, however, Young believes that the prevailing confusion over terms prohibits today's Church from calling missionaries "apostles." "But what we can do," says Young, "is return to a more Biblical standard for distinguishing those who work in different aspects of planting and building up churches."³⁵

Others caution that while a focus on mission is indispensable it is wrong to equate the apostolic function of missionaries with the apostolate of the first century.³⁶ Hywel Jones asserts that there are "no apostles today in the sense being argued for in the current charismatic scene. The twelve and Paul were Christ's masterbuilders. All others seek to work according to their pattern, given by the Lord and recorded by His Spirit." If certain individuals are to be considered apostles today, it is to be those "church-appointed men and women who devote themselves to the work of the gospel. These can be better described as pastors, teachers, preachers, evangelists, or missionaries." One of the strongest elements of Jones' argument lies in his treatment of 1 Cor 15:8. He maintains that the phrase "last of all" implies "that Paul was the last, and was to be the last to whom the resurrected Christ physically appeared. No other person like him, therefore, could be added to the band of the apostles of Jesus Christ." According to the best of Greek scholarship the phrase *eschaton de pantōn* implies finality "in which there is nothing to follow."³⁷ But Jones' argument is based on the assumption that no distinction exists between the apostleship of the Twelve (and Paul) and that of the other so-called apostles in the NT.

Larry W. Caldwell, another proponent of pneumatic apostolicity, distinguishes between "office" apostles and "ministry" apostles. While the first constituted a "once-for-all-time group directly commissioned by Jesus Christ," the "second group of individuals with the spiritual gift of apostleship . . . consisted of those believers who . . . had the gift that compelled them to minister in primarily cross-cultural situations planting new churches." Moreover Caldwell sees a further distinction between those designated ministry apostles: "missionary" apostles, whom the Holy Spirit sent out through local churches to plant churches cross-culturally, and "task" apostles, who were sent out by individuals and local churches to

³⁴ Young, "That Some" 103-104

³⁵ *Ibid* 104

³⁶ Cf Bromley, *Christian Ministry* 151-154, Kasemann, "Ministry" 70-75

³⁷ H R Jones, "Are There Apostles Today?", *Evangelical Review of Theology* 9/2 (April 1985) 107-116, esp 116, 111 Cf BAGD 314, TDNT 2 697

perform certain tasks, thus "paralleling the then current Jewish understanding of *shaliach*."³⁸

The contribution of pneumatic apostolicity is to be assessed in its focus on the Holy Spirit as the giver of *charismata* by which the apostolic nature of the Church is effected. Ernst Käsemann points out that the term *charisma* as it is used in the NT includes both the concept of ministry and function. After documenting the breadth of usage enjoyed by this term, Käsemann concludes that it is the intention of the *charismata* to embrace the whole of life. The Church as a whole is apostolic, for it is the Church, comprised of gifted individuals, that fulfills the missionary nature of Christ himself.³⁹ Caldwell agrees, insisting that the Church corporately needs to exercise its God-given authority in relationship to its commission.⁴⁰

Jan Kupka takes this a step farther, stressing that "the entire Church as the people of God is also of its innermost essence a missionary, i.e., an apostolically active, Church." Accordingly "all the baptized are incorporated into the one mission. They not only participate in the apostolate of the Church but rather form the apostolate, because they themselves are the Church, which does not merely have a mission but rather is a mission." The apostolate is not a *charisma* of the Spirit given to a select group but the multifaceted *charismata* that find expression in the Church corporately:

The diversity of the members that proceeds from the multiplicity of ministries and charisms should be understood in the sense that the members do not all have the same functions, although a fundamental equality in dignity and action reigns among them. By serving one another they form one body (Rom. 12:4) in order better to fulfill the mission of the Church. The entire Church is impelled by the Holy Spirit to a common work and cooperation, that the salvific plan of God may in fact be accomplished.⁴¹

Kerygmatic apostolicity looks to Pentecost as a significant event by which to construe its existence because it is both the grand occasion in which the life-giving Spirit was imparted to the Church and the supreme eschatological event by which the Church orients itself in history. It had the effect of taking up the OT concept of the day of the Lord and investing it with a fullness of meaning that was theretofore unobtainable. The NT expressions "last days," "last time," "ends of the ages" are all descriptions of the period between the first and second comings, a period that occupies a distinct position in God's *Heilsgeschichte*.

Caird observes that this telescoping of time not only functioned to merge historic future into a vision of the absolute future, regarding historic events as eschatological events insofar as they were embodiments or expressions of the final crisis, the ultimate *eschaton*, but also served to infuse

³⁸ Caldwell, *Sent Out!* 68-70

³⁹ Kasemann, "Ministry" 71

⁴⁰ Caldwell, *Sent Out!* 130

⁴¹ Kupka, "Laenapostolat" 412, 415 Cf also McClendon, *Systematic* 32 "The true church today is mission-oriented as was the apostolic church—according to the vision, it is the apostolic church", Moltmann, *Church* 360 "The apostolic church is the missionary church"

present events with eschatological significance, thus enhancing the force and relevance of OT prophecy: "Caligula's threat to set up his statue in the temple at Jerusalem suggested that Daniel's prophecy of a 'Desecrating Horror' was in process of fulfillment."⁴² Pentecost thereby served to augment Hebrew eschatology, transmuting it into a Christocentric worldview. As T. W. Manson states, "the reassertion in Christianity of the eschatological impulsion, the same impulsion which in older days raised men's eyes from sin to grace . . . now operates in Christianity to raise men's eyes from grace to glory."⁴³ Hermeneutically this eschatological worldview served as the basis for the early Church's prophetic reading of Scripture. Pragmatically it gave impetus to its apostolic mission.

According to Leonhard Goppelt, in the early Church the pneumatic and eschatological characteristics of the Christian faith formed a single element that coexisted in tension with the institutional dimension. As the Church approached the end of the apostolic period its struggle against gnosticism employed two antithetical tactics (i.e. "the two ways"). The first method endeavored to preserve the dialectic tension between the eschatological and historical dimension of the Church, "i.e. the tension between the Spirit and institution." Dissimilarly the "second way chose to relax this tension by subordinating the first element to the second." Thus "that part of the church which emphasized the pneumatic-eschatological element by means of the word was, for the most part, eliminated."⁴⁴ The genius of kerygmatic apostolicity is therefore to be assessed in the success with which it reunites the "pneumatic-eschatological" element.

To summarize, one finds the objective of adapting the timeless message of Christ to the exigencies of the present age (ecclesial apostolicity), the basis of authority and truth upon which to effect this objective (Biblical apostolicity), the lifegiving power from which this basis receives experiential relevance to effect the objective (pneumatic apostolicity), and the worldview by which the perspective and sense of mission needed to fulfill this objective are achieved (kerygmatic apostolicity).

IV. MARKS OF APOSTOLICITY

At this point four marks of apostolicity may be delineated. They are by no means the only observable characteristics of apostolic Christianity, but it is safe to say that they are definitive in their own right. Nor are they all necessarily present in the same measure. In most instances one particular mark is ascendant.

1. *Relevance.* Apostolic Christianity possesses both the ability to see itself in relationship to its own age and the commitment to adapt the timeless

⁴² Caird, *Apostolic Age* 189-193 The anabaptists applied Scripture similarly Cf McClendon, "Primitive" 10-12

⁴³ As quoted in Caird, *Apostolic Age* 194

⁴⁴ Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic* 145, *Current Issues* 204

message of Christ to the specific needs obtaining in that age. It is ever responsive to the exigencies of its time. Hence although the essence of the gospel remains unchanged, doctrinal formulations and ecclesial structures remain flexible.

As a congregation seeks to instantiate its apostolicity through a relevant explication of the timeless message of Christ it is brought face to face with its oneness in diversity. Indeed the uniqueness of each particular time and place mandates the diversity with which apostolic Christianity must take its shape. Its unity is an evangelical unity, not an institutional one. It is a unity amid diversity and freedom that was characteristic of apostolic Christianity from the very beginning. Its sense of oneness with other Christian traditions is based therefore not on a uniformity of doctrinal formulation or ecclesial structure but on a shared commitment to communicating the gospel in terms suited to the exigencies that call it forth. Thus a serendipity: As the apostolic Church seeks to be relevant it realizes its oneness.

2. *Regeneracy.* The apostolic Church is comprised only of regenerate believers. Responsiveness to Scripture issues in the expression of personal faith and the experience of personal salvation. The Church apostolic is a believers' Church whose appeal to Scripture is borne out of a sense of participation in the life and promise of Scripture.

Only through its self-awareness as God's covenant people can the Church construe its present existence in terms of the significant events of Scripture. Only so can it see itself in proper relationship to the world around it: at once participants in the drama of its own age, at once distinct from it. It is this typological relationship to the world of Scripture that enables the apostolic Church to effect its "midcourse correction, a re-discovery of something from the past whose pertinence was not seen before" (to use the words of Yoder). As the apostolic Church seeks to adapt the changeless message of Christ to the particularities of the present, it meets the challenge to stand apart as the holy people of God. Thus another serendipity: As the apostolic Church seeks to actualize its regeneracy it realizes its holiness.

3. *Charismata.* The apostolic Church is a pneumatic community, manifestly gifted by the Holy Spirit. As a believers' Church it is both sanctified and empowered by the life-giving Spirit of Scripture. It is through the joint participation in the communion and empowerment of the Holy Spirit that the experiences of God's-people-now coalesce with the experiences of God's-people-then. Through the guidance and gifting of the Spirit the apostolic community achieves a sense of united diversity as it adapts the changeless message of Christ to the specific needs obtaining in its own time (cf. Eph 4:3-16). Through this pneumatic initiative the people of God stand open to their diverse ministries, tasks and gifts.

Moreover the universality of God's kingdom is brought into focus through the Spirit's ministry in the Church. The united diversity that exists at the congregational level may also be observed at the corporate level. Herein lies a pedagogical aspect of the Spirit's *charismata*. The universality of the Spirit's work in shaping the message of Christ for all people in every time and place necessitates diversity at every level. Hence another serendipity: As the apostolic Church partakes of the *charismata* of the Spirit it becomes aware of its catholicity.

4. *Mission*. The eschatological worldview of the apostolic Church provides both the rationale for its self-understanding in relationship to the world of Scripture and the impetus for its missionary endeavors in relationship to the present.

The catholic mission is an eschatological mission. Insofar as the mission of God's people is concerned, "catholic" is a preeminently eschatological conception of the Church. The power of God's future lordship, which was first manifested in the teaching and mission of Jesus, now finds its apostolic counterpart in the universal mission to all nations. Thus another serendipity: As the apostolic Church, prompted by its eschatological worldview, is engaged in mission it actualizes its apostolicity.

Although these marks of apostolicity are manifest within the pluralism of today's Christian scene, a consciousness of their distinctly apostolic character is not. It is therefore as much a matter of recognizing the apostolic nature of the Church as seeking to actualize it afresh. While these marks may not tell the whole story, they do suggest that the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" is essentially apostolic.