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## **APOSTOLIC FUNCTION: THE PARADIGM OF MISSIONARY IDENTITY**

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In this presentation I am going to argue that collectively we need a new sense of missionary identity. I am using identity here in the sense of “who we think we are” as cross cultural workers, and “who others think we are” when they view us in the missionary role. Identity is that internal compass that gives direction to missionary work and provides the bigger picture into which cross-cultural workers and teams fit. The rationale for a new identity is rooted in the problems associated with our current one. In broad brush strokes this is how cross-cultural workers are often viewed and view themselves:

The primary factor that makes a person a missionary is crossing a geographic boundary, and this often includes a cultural boundary as well.

After crossing this border, the missionary does all kinds of good things (pan-missionism),

which often includes what are seen as “spiritual” activities (like evangelism, planting churches, and training leaders) and “social” service (like helping the poor).

These first two points are explicit in our thinking, but a third is implicit and rarely brought into the level of discourse: missionaries need to produce tangible results in their work. This weights the work toward that which is countable, quantifiable, and reportable—whether it is souls won, buildings built, or orphans housed and fed.

In this identity there are two important concepts that are missing. The first is that there are no criteria to distinguish missionary activity from the activity of regular Christians except where it takes place culturally or geographically. Eventually this comes back to haunt the whole enterprise of missions because if there is indeed no difference between what I should be doing in my own local church in my own sociocultural setting and somewhere else, there is no compelling reason to cross geographic and cultural boundaries at all. Local need will always overwhelm the less visible and tangible need of those different than us and who are far removed via physical or cultural distance.

The second is that there is nothing to galvanize the positive insights of this identity to mobilize Christians to go where the church does not exist. The configuration of missionary presence that Jaffarian noted is not accidental;<sup>1</sup> it

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<sup>1</sup>“The statistical facts of the world missionary situation show that the churches of the world instead are following a missiology that says missionaries are most needed in circumstances not of poverty but of wealth, not of oppression but of freedom, not where non-Christians are, but where Christians are, and not where most have not heard the gospel but where most have not only heard it but received it. Most of the largest missionary-receiving countries in the world are relatively wealthy, free, and Christian. The real, demonstrated sending priorities apparently emphasize helping Christians become better Christians rather than helping non-Christians consider Christ—or helping Christians of one kind (usually Catholic or Orthodox) become Christians of another kind (evangelical or Catholic or charismatic, and so on) rather than helping

grows out of unwritten and unspoken values about what “counts” in the eyes of workers and those that send them. What we now require is a missionary identity that maintains a difference between the role of local Christians, not simply in location but in the kind of work they do, that takes into account the presence/absence and strength/weakness of Christian movements in the people among whom we are working, and which can make a compelling call to take the gospel to those who have no near-neighbor witness.

I want to propose that missionary identity be rooted in the idea of apostolic function. I will define this term in detail below, but for a working sense, by apostolic function, I am focusing on how apostles both conceived their task and what they actually did. The notion of apostolic function I am advocating takes on paradigmatic status just like church planting/growth, frontier missions to the unreached, and Christian social concern. For the missionary team corporately and individually to see itself functioning in an apostolic fashion and with apostolic purposes is a powerful identity that shapes all missionary activity and the reasons for that activity.

To set the stage for my concept of apostolic function I will begin with a biblical overview of apostolic ministry in the New Testament. I will then discuss how apostolic function can serve as a heuristic for cross-cultural work and missionary identity, and conclude by looking at some broad themes related to this idea of apostolic function and how it relates to our current context.

## **Biblical Overview**

Betz notes that while the term “apostle” is well attested in the New Testament and early Christian writing,

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those who have not heard the gospel to hear it.” Michael E. Jaffarian, “The Statistical State of the Missionary Enterprise.” *Missiology: An International Review* 30, no. 1 (2002): 28.

there are numerous unresolved problems associated with the term.<sup>2</sup> As with some other key New Testament terms, it appears that the early Christians chose “an unfamiliar word, seldom used in the secular language, with little ready-made content, in order to fill it with one expressing its own conceptions.”<sup>3</sup> Some of the issues include a variety of shades of definition,<sup>4</sup> the relationship between Christian apostleship and the Jewish institution of the *saliah*,<sup>5</sup> the

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<sup>2</sup>Hans Dieter Betz, “Apostle,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 309. It is often noted by authors writing on this subject that it was Lightfoot’s essay “The Name and Office of an Apostle” in his 1865 commentary on Galatians that laid out the fundamental problems that have occupied research on apostleship in the modern period. Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, 3rd ed., Classic Commentary Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962). See Rudolph Schnackenburg, “Apostles Before and During Paul’s Time,” in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 287; Walter Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 19; Francis H. Agnew, “The Origin of the NT Apostle Concept: A Review of Research,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 1 (1986): 76. Schutz cites Lightfoot’s work as defining the problem and points out that the name and office of apostle is a vexing and intractable problem of New Testament studies. John Howard Schutz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 4.

<sup>3</sup>Dietrich Muller, “Apostle, *Apostello* (Part),” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 135.

<sup>4</sup>See Hans Dieter Betz, “Apostle,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 309.

<sup>5</sup>The dominant view in scholarship has been that of Rengstorff (1964, 421, 424) who roots the idea of apostleship in history with the personal call of Jesus and connects it with the Jewish concept of *saliah* (427). However, this view has been argued against; see Muller (131-134) for a review of alternative positions on this issue. Muller offers the thought that the verb *apostello* should perhaps be seen as the starting point for a solution since in secular Greek it already carried the idea of divine authorization. Since the Hellenistic church would likely not have

relationship between Luke's identification of the disciples of Jesus during his earthly life with the apostles and the Twelve, Paul's reinterpretation of the idea of apostleship,<sup>6</sup> and the lack of clarity as to who could be reckoned an apostle and how many there were.<sup>7</sup> There is an ongoing debate as to how to understand the office of apostle as it functioned in the early church and whether or not the office is thus limited to that first generation or continues as an ecclesiastical office or function.<sup>8</sup>

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understood the idea of the *saliah*, Gentile Christians would have understood the idea of apostle already from the secular Greek concept as an authorized messenger. *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>6</sup>Betz, 310-311. For good overviews of some of the main issues regarding origins of the apostolate see J. Andrew Kirk, "Apostleship Since Rengstorf: Towards a Synthesis," *New Testament Studies* 21, no. 2 (1975); Colin G. Kruse, "Apostle," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992); Schnackenburg; and Agnew. The major positions on the origins of apostles are views relating to the Jewish institution of the *saliah*, views that see it rooted in Christian sources, Gnostic influence, and modified views with all three of those playing a part to some degree.

<sup>7</sup>See Muller, 130; Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, "Apostello, (Pempo), Exapostello, Apostolos, Pseudoapostolos, Apostole," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), 431.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 432. Schmithals sees the message and the office given by Jesus (Schmithals, 31) and von Campenhausen understands the rank and authority of the apostolate as restricted to the first apostolic generation "and can be neither continued nor renewed once this has come to an end." Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), 23. Jones argues that the "last of all" in I Corinthians 15:8 is indeed chronological and thus creates serious difficulties for all views of ongoing apostolic ministry whether Pentecostal/Charismatic or Roman Catholic. Peter R. Jones, "I Corinthians 15:8: Paul the Last Apostle," *Tyndale Bulletin* 36 (1985): 30-31. Kirk, however, argues that there is an underlying unity to all of the distinctions and discontinuities found in the New Testament; it is the special call of Christ and the one apostolic mission (Kirk: 262). He concludes that the continuity is rooted in the nature of the call and the

Acknowledging the areas of debate, I now want to set forth my own positions that will stake out the parameters for my arguments about what I am calling “apostolic function”. First, I make a distinction between apostle as an office and as a function. Part of our contemporary difficulty with the use and understanding of the term apostle has to do with the conceptual tangling of apostles as the initial founders of the church (Ephesians 2:20), the unique position of the Twelve, and the fact that the term was applied to a wider group than those who were the original followers of Jesus.<sup>9</sup> Fee’s comment is relevant here:

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specific task which is proclamation and church planting, while the discontinuity is in the differing historical circumstances and way in which that call comes (Ibid.: 264. Therefore, it is not “contrary to the New Testament witness to consider that the same apostolic ministry in differing historical circumstances, exists to this day” Ibid. Fee holds to a view that allows for ongoing function and first century uniqueness: “Can anything be said in our day about ‘apostles’? Given the two criteria expressed here, one would have to allow that apostles do not exist in the sense that Paul defines his own ministry. But it should also be noted that this might be too narrow a view, based strictly on Paul’s own personal experience. His more functional understanding of apostleship (see on 1:1) would certainly have its modern counterparts in those who found and lead churches in unevangelized areas. Only when ‘apostle’ is used in a non-Pauline sense of ‘guarantors of the traditions’ would the usage be narrowed to the first century.” Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1987), 397. Fee interprets the “last of all” in I Corinthians 15:8 as a final link in the enumerative chain so that it means, “finally” (Ibid., 732; see his overview of the debate on the term on 732 footnote 98).

<sup>9</sup>Fee points out that in I Corinthians 15:5 the reference to “the Twelve” that early on this was a title given to the special group that Jesus called to be with him. “This designation for Jesus’ disciples, plus the fact that Paul will later refer to another appearance to ‘all the apostles’ (v. 7), suggest most strongly that the joining of these two terms into the title ‘the twelve apostles’ had not yet taken place in the church. That is, in Paul’s view ‘the Twelve’ were a distinct entity, no doubt considered apostles, but the latter designation covered a much larger group of people” (Ibid., 729). The wider group where the term apostle is used includes I Corinthians 15:7, (all the apostles and James the brother of the Lord), Andronicus and Junia in Romans 16:7 (where it is likely that this is a

Part of the problem with the term is that it has a sense of function as well as that of office or position. That is, it primarily had to do with some who were 'sent' by Christ to preach the gospel (cf. 1:17). But those who were so sent, and especially those who founded churches as a result of their evangelizing, came to be known as apostles, a designation that had inherent in it a sense of position as well (especially for those who were directly associated with Christ in his earthly ministry). In Paul the functional and positional usages nearly coalesce.<sup>10</sup>

By making a distinction between the office of apostle as those who played a special role in the initial founding of the church, who were commissioned personally by Jesus, and who were used by the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture from a wider group that functioned as "bearers of the NT message"<sup>11</sup> I am creating space for an ongoing apostolic role while holding a sense of the office as limited to the first generation.<sup>12</sup>

A second area concerns issues of authority and church organization, which are often tied together. There are some who would argue that the church is better served when it is organized around apostolic leadership and that those who lead are recognized and given authority as apostles.<sup>13</sup>

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husband and wife Betz, 310. and Fee, 729 footnote 80.), Barnabas (Acts 14:4, I Corinthians 9:5-6) and Paul himself.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>11</sup>Rengstorf, 422.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. This is essentially Kirk's position that I have noted above in footnote 7.

<sup>13</sup>See for instance, C. Peter Wagner, "The New Apostolic Reformation," in *The New Apostolic Churches*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998), 13-25. Starting in the mid to late 1990s there has been a spate of writing looking at the restoration of apostolic ministry in one form or another, David Cannistraci, *Apostles and the Emerging*

What I find interesting is that such an approach seems to assume that more authority equals more success in terms of church growth and thus can legitimize authoritarian cultural modes of leadership by wrapping it in the mantle of apostleship.<sup>14</sup> I think that it is wise to keep two things in

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*Apostolic Movement* (Ventura, CA: Renew, 1996); David Cartledge, *The Apostolic Revolution: The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Assemblies of God in Australia* (Chester Hill, NSW, Australia: Paraclete Institute); John Eckhardt, *Moving in the Apostolic* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999); Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006); Bryn Jones, *The Radical Church: Restoring the Apostolic Edge* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1999); Bishop Claude E. Payne and Hamilton Beazley, *Reclaiming the Great Commission: A Practical Model for Transforming Denominations and Congregations* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000); C. Peter Wagner, "The New Apostolic Reformation," in *The New Apostolic Churches*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998); C. Peter Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999); C. Peter Wagner, ed. *The New Apostolic Churches: Rediscovering the New Testament Model of Leadership and Why It Is God's Desire for the Church Today* (Ventura, California: Regal, 1998). C. Peter Wagner, *Aftershock! How the Second Apostolic Ages Is Changing the Church*. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2004). Synan notes the recent interest in Pentecostal circles on the restoration of the "fivefold ministries" of Ephesians 4:11-13. Vinson Synan, "Apostolic Practice," in *He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the 21st Century*, ed. Edgar R. Lee, Encounter: The Pentecostal Ministry Series (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2005), 12. Pentecostals-charismatics believe that the *charismata* (gifts of the Spirit) have been restored and thus the question is often asked as to why the offices of apostle and prophet have not been restored to the church? (Ibid., 14). He reviews major church traditions and provides an excellent overview and critique of what is called the New Apostolic Reformation (Ibid., 16-23).

<sup>14</sup>Heuser and Klaus note that Pentecostal-charismatic ideology carries within it both a liberating belief system connected to the promises of encounter with God and divine assistance and the potential for abusive leaders to thrive. Roger Heuser and Byron Klaus, "Charismatic Leadership Theory: A Shadow Side Confessed," in *He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the 21st Century*, ed. Edgar R. Lee, Encounter: The Pentecostal Ministry Series (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2005), 121. It can produce "self-sacrificing,



perspective when looking at issues of authority and church organization. The first is that in terms of the biblical data Paul uses the term *exousia* (authority) “fewer than a dozen times in his writings, mostly as something he refuses to exercise even when it has the support of Jesus’ express command.”<sup>15</sup> Banks notes that Paul’s relationship with his churches is for the most part expressed in the terminology of family life (father, mother, nurse) “rather than through the analogies from the legal, administrative, political, or even religious sphere,” he uses “exhortation and appeal rather than command or decree,” and “never employs the very strong term of command, *epitage*, for his own instructions.”<sup>16</sup> The second is that merely changing leadership terminology away from business language, or traditional church language, in favor of “apostle” and the idea of networking while the basic substructure is rooted in church growth theory and highly gifted CEO type leaders of large churches does little to address the malaise of the church in the West. Hirsch’s comments are relevant here: church growth concepts do not work for most of churches and nearly forty

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pioneering leadership that forges new frontiers under the ‘fire and cloud’ of an eschatological identity” but also “yields the possibility of non-accountable dynamic leaders who fashion a following with the ‘sound-bites’ of God-like utterances in the context of manipulative phenomenology, thus creating an image of powerful ministry leadership” (Ibid.). They also point out that while charismatic leadership can be potentially abusive, the routinized institutional leadership that follows “is implicitly controlling” (Ibid., 123). At the end of the day, it is the temptation of all forms of leadership to control and use power for its own benefits. Those who champion charismatic leadership often conceived of as the exercise of apostleship, as the cure for the abuses and control of institutionalism are naïve to assume that such leaders will either eliminate the problems of abuse of power or stave off the eventual appearance of status quo, pragmatic, institutional forms.

<sup>15</sup>Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting*, revised edition ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 174.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 175-176.

years of church growth thinking has not halted the decline of the church in the Western world.<sup>17</sup>

For those who are tempted to baptize authoritarian and hierarchical forms of leadership and church organization under the notion of apostleship as presented in the New Testament, Ritva Williams offers an analysis of the data that must be reckoned with.<sup>18</sup> Focusing on the household as the social setting of where churches met, Williams develops how both Jesus and Paul see groups that center around Jesus functioning as surrogate families or fictive kinship groups.<sup>19</sup> She then examines the role of patrons and patronage networks and the role of intermediaries and brokers in those relationships. She concludes that:

the organization of the early churches as fictive kinship groups simultaneously restricted patriarchal status to God and the role of patron to the heavenly Father, and cast Jesus, the disciples, and later church leaders most frequently in the role of brokers.<sup>20</sup>

Williams work that shows Jesus and his early followers, by both critiquing and reordering the patriarchal household to put God the Father at the center of the new family of faith, renders problematic hierarchical, authoritarian and benevolent patron models that dominate human societies.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Hirsch, 36, see also footnote 7.

<sup>18</sup>Ritva H. Williams, *Stewards, Prophets, Keepers of the Word* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006).

<sup>19</sup>See *Ibid.*, 184-192 for the summary of her work on Jesus and Paul and the functions of steward, prophet, and keeper of the word.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-4. She says that "Paul uses steward and stewardship language in relation to his own claims to status and authority within and over the churches that he has established. As we shall see, Paul's strategy offers a subversive critique of the dominant Greco-Roman ideology of benevolent patriarchy endorsed by his critics" (*Ibid.*, 4).

While issues of authority and organization are not irrelevant in cross-cultural church planting, I think that there are bigger issues at stake for missions in the arena of apostolic identity and activity. While scholarship continues to explore a number of issues related to apostleship, when it comes to what apostles actually do, there is a great deal of agreement. The verb *apostello* in classical Greek means to send and was used in contexts of delegation where an envoy had the full power to act as personal representative of the one sending.<sup>22</sup> It was used in the LXX to translate *salah*, which does not describe so much the sending as it does the authorization of the messenger not to an office but to a particular function or task.<sup>23</sup> *Apostolos* was originally an adjective derived from the verb and as a noun has the basic concept of the sending of messengers or envoys.<sup>24</sup>

While there is a wide range of use of the term in the New Testament,<sup>25</sup> Betz points out that chronologically the earliest use in the New Testament is “as an administrative designation for envoys, delegates, and representatives” (II Corinthians 8:23, Philippians 2:25); it also has a more religious sense of a preacher of the Gospel (Acts 1:21-26, 13:1-3); then there is Luke's identification of the disciples of Jesus with the apostles and the Twelve, and Paul's reinterpretation which is different than that of Luke-Acts.<sup>26</sup> What is quite clear is that *apostolos* is used, as Rengstorf puts it more generically, as the comprehensive term for “the bearers of the New Testament message”.<sup>27</sup> Others use a term more familiar to modern Christians, but of more recent

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<sup>22</sup>Erich Von Eicken and Helgo Lindner, “Apostle, *Apostello* (Part),” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1975), 127; and Rengstorf, 400.

<sup>23</sup>Eicken and Lindner, 127.

<sup>24</sup>Betz, 309.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 309-310.

<sup>27</sup>Rengstorf, 422.

coinage in saying that the apostles were missionaries whose work was “centered in the proclamation of the gospel and the founding and administering of new churches (see I Cor 9:5, 12:28; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; Rev 18:20; Did. 11:3-6),”<sup>28</sup> that apostleship was bound with the duty of mission to the Gentiles<sup>29</sup> and that “we may take it as incontrovertible that the missionary commission was an essential part of the primitive Christian apostolate.”<sup>30</sup>

One of the problems with writers’ use of the term “missionary” to describe apostolic work is that we tend to read our current ideas about missions and missionaries back into these texts. Bosch reminds us that the term “missions” is of fairly recent origin. Prior to the 16th century *missio* (sending) was used as a theological term for the sending of the Son by the Father and the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son. In the 1700s, the Jesuits began to use the term for the spreading of the Christian faith.<sup>31</sup>

In order to attempt to gain something of a fresh look at this biblical material I want to avoid the use of the term “missionary” and try to focus specifically on what apostles did and then move from there to think about how it applies to our current situation and what light it sheds on our contemporary understandings of the terms “missionary” and “missions.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Betz, 309-310.

<sup>29</sup>Muller, 129.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 134. Schmithals (35), Schnackenburg (298, 301), and von Campenhausen (22) all use the term “missionary” to describe apostolic work although they see apostleship as embracing more than our modern notion of missionary covers. Schutz (36) says that nothing comes closer to suggest the central missionary nature of apostolic activity than the verb “evangelize” (*euangelizomai*).

<sup>31</sup>David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 9 ed., 21 vols., American Society of Missiology Series, vol. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 1.

<sup>32</sup>In doing this I am trying to follow Kostenberger’s encouragement to let the New Testament speak to us on its own terms, rather than finding “what we have already determined to find there on

## The Work of Apostles

### Proclaiming the Kingdom, bearing witness to Jesus, and planting churches

Those who were called to be with Jesus were sent out to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom (Mark 3:14, 6:6-12; Matthew 10:5-9; Luke 9:1-6). Jesus then commissioned his followers to make disciples of the *ethne* and to be his witnesses moving from Jerusalem outward to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). In the book of Acts, Luke follows the program of 1:8 as the good news moves from Jerusalem and Judea with the establishment of the church there (the believers in Jerusalem are called collectively the church in Acts 5:11, 8:1, 3, and 11:22; more broadly there is reference to the “church in Judea” Acts 9:31) into Samaria through the ministry of Philip (8:4-8) and Peter and John as they preach in Samaritan villages on their return to Jerusalem (Acts 8:25), and then crosses into Gentile communities with Peter (Acts 10:27-48) and unnamed disciples from Cyrus and Cyrene plant the church among Greeks at Antioch in Acts 11:19-21, 11:26. Luke then traces the work of Paul as he moves out from the Antioch church to make disciples and establish them as local churches (see Acts 16:40-41 for churches in Syria and Cilicia; Acts 14:23 for churches formed on his first missionary journey out of Antioch in Galatia and Phrygia; and Acts 16, Philippi; Acts

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other grounds”. Andreas J. Kostenberger, "The Place of Mission in New Testament Theology: An Attempt to Determine the Significance of Mission within the Scope of the New Testament's Message as a Whole," *Missiology: An International Review* 27, no. 3 (1999): 349. I also am aware that to synthetically draw together material across various biblical sources cuts against the grain of scholarship that would see varying strains and ideas of apostleship across these writings. In this exercise I am taking the broadest view of apostleship as including those who were called by Jesus in Gospels to be with him, and who are designated in Acts and from the writings of Paul. For reviews that include what apostles do, see Campenhausen, 12-29 and Schmithals' discussion of the apostolate of Paul (21-57).

17, Thessalonica and Berea; Acts 18, Corinth; and Acts 19-20 for Ephesus).

### **Ministry with power, signs and wonders**

It is inherent in the call of Jesus to follow Him that the disciple takes on the task of Jesus and is given power and authority to fulfill that task. Jesus makes the disciples fishers of men (Matthew 4:19), those called to be with him are sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons (Mark 3:14-15), when the 12 and 70 are sent out, they are given power and authority to drive out demons, cure diseases and proclaim the coming of God's rule (Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-12). They are called to be in intimate relationship with Jesus and bear fruit (John 15:1-8) and to do his works (John 14:12). Acts 1:1 serves as a theological bridge between Luke and Acts by showing that in the Gospel, Luke wrote about what Jesus began to do and teach. The book of Acts continues the works of Jesus, even after He is ascended as the Holy Spirit gives power to His disciples. In the opening presentations of Acts, the church is founded in Jerusalem and the apostles bear witness to the resurrection with great power (4:33) and signs and wonders (5:12). Miracles, signs and wonders are not just the province of the apostles but happen through others as well (Stephen, Acts 6:8; Philip, Acts 8:4-8). In the ministry of Paul, both in Luke's record and in his writings, healings and works of power play a significant role in the advancement of the gospel (see 13:9-11; a generic report of signs and wonders in 14:3; a report of extraordinary miracles through Paul 14:8-10, 19:11; 20:10; and Paul's own reflections Romans 15:19; I Corinthians 2:1-4; II Corinthians 12:12).

### **Ministry led by the Holy Spirit**

Bruce, in his commentary on Acts, notes that a leading theological theme of Luke is the leading of the

Spirit.<sup>33</sup> While the record focuses on a few of the leading personalities, Luke shows that it is the entire community of followers that is constituted by the Spirit. Bruce summarizes in this way:

The Christian community is Spirit-filled and Spirit-led, so much so that its voice is the voice of the Spirit (cf., e.g., 5:3, 15:28) and the whole evangelistic enterprise from Jerusalem to Rome, is directed by the Spirit (cf., e.g., 16:6-10).<sup>34</sup>

Bruce points out that it is part of Luke's plan in writing to show that the progress of the faith "was no mere product of human planning, it was directed by divine agency."<sup>35</sup> These "bearers of the New Testament message" were led and empowered by the Spirit to proclaim the good news and, demonstrate it with miraculous signs, wonders, and healings. Carter, summarizing apostolic methods that were used to make Christ known, includes personal witness, miracles, oral preaching, itineration, charities, church organization and supervision, training of promising converts, planting the Gospel in strategic centers and writing and circulating Christian letters.<sup>36</sup> He points out that this was not simply the work of a few, but that in the early church there was a sense that the responsibility of universal witness was upon every believer.<sup>37</sup> "Whatever social, economic, political, or other implications the Gospel may have had, the primary and

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<sup>33</sup>Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, ed. Gordon D. Fee, Revised ed., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 13; see also Williams, 6.

<sup>34</sup>Bruce, 13, note 48.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>36</sup>C. W. Carter, "Apostolic Age," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 223.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

distinctive aim of the 1st century Christians was to make Christ known to all the world as Savior and Lord.”<sup>38</sup>

## **Suffering**

The ministry of the apostles was marked by opposition, persecution, and suffering. In Jerusalem, Peter and John were apprehended after the healing of the crippled man at the temple gate (Acts 4:3-22). At that point they were commanded not to speak or teach in Jesus’ name. Later the apostles, as a group, were arrested (Acts 5:18), miraculously freed by an angel of the Lord (5:19), were then retaken without force (5:26), flogged and released (5:40). After Paul’s conversion, his testimony in Damascus leads the Jews to attempt to kill him (Acts 9:23) and, when he comes to Jerusalem, the same thing happens and he is sent off to Tarsus for his safety (9:29-30). At a later period, James was martyred by Herod (Acts 12:2) and then Peter was taken with the same intent, but again miraculously delivered (12:6-11). Luke’s record of Paul’s missionary journeys in Acts are laced with abuse and violence as he proclaims the message of Jesus (there is abusive talk against the preaching 13:44, 14:2, 17:13; persecution 13:50; stoning 14:19; jail and flogging 16:19-24; rioting 17:5, 19:23-41; bringing Paul to court 18:12-13; and finally his arrest in Jerusalem, imprisonment and trip to Rome in the final presentations of Acts). Paul’s own letters shed more light on the sufferings he faced (Romans 15:31; I Corinthians 2:1-4, 16:8; II Corinthians 1:8-11; his long list of hardships in II Corinthians 6:3-10 and 11:21b-29; I Thessalonians 2:1-2; II Timothy 2:9) and his view that apostles are like men condemned to death who are the scum of the earth and refuse of the world (I Corinthians 4:8-13).

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid. See Kostenberger, 353, for a series of citations from N. T. Wright and others on the centrality of missionary activity to the Christian faith of the first century and Wright’s conclusion that that world mission is the most obvious feature of Christian praxis.



## Caring for the weak

It is a telling sign of our tendency in the West to split the “spiritual” and “physical/social” domains that our images of apostolic ministry rarely include images of caring for the weak and marginalized.<sup>39</sup> Our earliest records of the church is that it devoted itself to apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42); note the concern that no one lack in the new community constituted by the Spirit. While the apostles see their focus of ministry as the preaching of the Word and prayer, they provide the impetus for the mechanism that cared for the Greek widows. Paul says to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:34-35:

You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord

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<sup>39</sup>It is interesting that the intense debate found among Christians who believe in the authority of Scripture regarding the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility was not problematic for either Jesus or Paul. You cannot pick up a book on missions without having to deal with the issue of evangelism and social action. McGee notes that, “Missionaries and church leaders have long struggled with the tension between preaching the gospel and establishing charitable ministries (schools, orphanages, and hospitals) overseas. Should the missionary focus on saving souls or saving lives? Can one be done without “lionizing” the importance of the other?” Gary B. McGee, “Saving Souls or Saving Lives?,” *Paraclete* 28, no. 4 (1994): 11. There are three views that I personally find unsatisfactory that represent common attempts to explain the relationship between evangelism and social action. The first is to say that our only concern is to preach the Gospel, which treats people as if they were disembodied spirits with only souls that need to be saved. The second asserts that we do good deeds in order preach the Gospel which makes us appear to be dangling a carrot on a stick before needy people. The third is the expression “no distinction between word and deed” which logically leads to “deeds” without words since they are equivalent, and thus in reverse compartmentalizes deeds away from the words that bring the interpretation of those very deeds.

Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Paul and the apostles in Jerusalem shared a concern for the poor believers there (Galatians 2:10). His work on collecting an offering for them (I Corinthians 16:1-4), his concern that widows be cared for by the local church (I Timothy 5:3-16), and his admonition to help the weak (*asthenes*—the same word as in the Acts passage which can refer to economic weakness and poverty in both contexts) shows that he did not conduct himself in an either/or fashion. The experience of being reconciled to God, and living as a community under the rule of God, meant that these things were the natural expressions and implications worked out in human relationships of the message that he preached.

### **Ministry as an Apostolic Team**

Both from Luke's account of Paul's work in Acts and from his own writings, we know that Paul did not work as an individual but in a team.<sup>40</sup> Bank's work on the early house churches shows that there were distinct differences between how Paul conceived of the churches he was planting versus his church planting group. In the *ekklesia*, the "body" metaphor is dominant, with its focus on the participation in a common life. With those who traveled and labored with him Paul used the term *ergon* (work) to describe it, where the focus was the sharing of a common task.<sup>41</sup> He notes that in terms of the apparatus for planting churches and the network

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<sup>40</sup>Roger S. Greenway and Timothy M. Monsma, *Cities: Missions' New Frontier* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 14, points out that while much of what happened in the New Testament about missionary outreach is not recorded, but what is clear is that it was not the work of a few individuals but an extended group of apostolic associates.

<sup>41</sup>Banks, 160-161. See Galatians 6:4; I Corinthians 3:8-15, 9:1, 16:10, Philippians 2:30

of relationships built around it, there are no parallels in the religious propagation of that period.<sup>42</sup> He summarizes that nature of Paul's church planting band as a grouping of specialists identified by their gifts, backed by sponsoring families and communities, with a specific function and structure focused on preaching the gospel, founding churches and helping them to mature.<sup>43</sup> In a seminal article, Winter describes the two redemptive structures found in the New Testament, the local church and missionary band.<sup>44</sup> He argues that across church history there have been comparable indigenous structures that have the same function.<sup>45</sup> In order to compare differing formal structures with similar function, he employs the terms modality and sodality. A modality "is a structured fellowship in which there is no distinction of sex or age" like local churches, and a sodality "is a structure fellowship in which membership involves an adult second decision beyond modality membership" like the missionary band.<sup>46</sup> As modalities, local congregations are "admirably suited to carry out the task of mission in the local context"<sup>47</sup> while the mission sodality was

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 169. See Glasser's detailed treatment of the apostolic team Arthur F. Glasser and others, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 300-304; and Joseph C. and Michele C., "Field-Governed Mission Structures Part I: In the New Testament," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 18, no. 2 (2001): 60-64. For an overview on the origins of mission structures, see Brian Stanley, "Where Have Our Mission Structures Come From?," *Transformation* 20, no. 1 (2003); and for a look at structures of the past and where they are heading in the future, see Stanley Skreslet, "Impending Transformation: Mission Structures for a New Century," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, (1999).

<sup>44</sup>Ralph Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 220.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 222.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 224.

<sup>47</sup>Glasser and others, 300.

a mobile team dedicated to “surmounting all the geographic, cultural, and linguistic barriers keeping tribes, tongues and nations from the knowledge of Christ.”<sup>48</sup>

## **Where Apostolic Ministry Took Place**

While the work of preaching the gospel by apostolic teams is recognized, the issue of where they went and how they made those decisions has not traditionally been a focus in studies dealing with apostleship. However, I think that it is precisely at these points that the issues of apostolic identity are most clearly revealed. Looking broadly at the biblical material, there are four elements to bring into consideration.

### **Pioneer church planting**

The first is that from the starting point of the early church, their commission, which had the soteriological focus of proclaiming the gospel message of God's gracious salvation to be appropriated by faith,<sup>49</sup> was carried out in what we would today describe as pioneer settings. Meaning by this that literally everywhere these early witnesses went they were planting the first churches and communities of Christ followers. This is an important point because in our setting 2000 years later, with the vast expansion of Christianity, it is easy for us to think of “proclaiming the gospel” and planting communities of faith as an activity that happens in the context of many various (and sometimes competing) expressions of Christianity, rather than winning the first generation of disciples in places where there were none before.

Thus, Kostenberger makes the right observation, that while in contemporary use “missions” generally refers to cross-cultural ministry, the biblical terminology does not require this. He points out that mission in the New

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 301.

<sup>49</sup>Kostenberger: 348.

Testament centers around a person or group's commission to a particular task, one which is soteriological in nature.<sup>50</sup> However, he then jumps to a conclusion that is not warranted: that “the cross-cultural aspect of Christian mission is not a necessary part of mission” even after noting that Acts 1:8 shows that “mission may, and frequently will, involve the crossing of ethnic, cultural, or other boundaries.”<sup>51</sup> I think that what happens here is again the confusion that results from taking the word “mission” with all of its history and trying to find it in the New Testament. In the paragraph in question, Kostenberger wants to avoid a too narrow definition of missions as well as a too broad one. At the end of the day, this attempt to walk the terminological middle falls short because it misses the “pioneer” nature of the New Testament setting and tries to locate a fixed meaning for mission in regard to the crossing of cultural boundaries when the situation is dynamic and not static.

### **Specific callings and specific guidance**

A second piece of evidence is that it becomes apparent that in the New Testament there is a sense of both fluidity and specificity to the commissioning to proclaim the gospel. Paul sees himself as apostle to the Gentiles (1 Timothy 2:7, Galatians 2:7-8, Romans 15:16) while Peter is an apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:7-8). Thus, there appears to be a general sense of the overall direction that they pursued in their work of preaching the gospel. Peter worked primarily within his own cultural background and Paul worked primarily outside of his own. There is also fluidity that can come from the sovereign work and specific guidance of the Holy Spirit. Peter's vision and the direction of the Spirit (Acts 10:9-20) means that he becomes the vessel by God's choice from whose lips the Gentiles would first hear

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

the Gospel (Acts 15:7).<sup>52</sup> Paul, on the other hand, carries a tremendous personal burden for his own people (Romans 9:1-4) and shares the gospel with them at every opportunity, yet spends the bulk of his time planting churches among majority Gentile populations.

What we see here is a natural outgrowth of the commission to make disciples of the *ethne* (Matthew 28:18-20). The pursuit of this commission carries people across cultural and ethnic boundaries (Acts 1:8). At the same time, the Holy Spirit calls some witnesses to share the Good News primarily in their own sociocultural setting while others work cross-culturally. However, these broader “callings” do not negate specific guidance from the Spirit that will lead people to do something temporarily that is not the normal long-term focus.

### **Paul’s zeal to preach where Christ was not known**

This leads to a third factor that has to do with Paul’s sense of identity as an apostle.

Romans 15:20: "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."

Romans 15:23: "But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions,..."

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<sup>52</sup>See Bruce (289, footnote 36) for the reading on this verse that shows how God chose the apostles that through one of them, Peter as their representative, the Gentiles might hear the Gospel. Interestingly, Bruce notes that it Peter’s action with Gentiles “may have been one reason for the speed with which James the Just was henceforth acknowledged as the undisputed leaders of the mother-church: James at least enjoyed a public reputation which was unspotted by any suspicion of fraternizing with Gentiles” (Ibid., 223). Acts 21:20-26 illustrates how the understanding of the fellow apostles about the principle of evangelizing Gentiles was not shared widely by Jewish background believers.

II Corinthians 10:16: "...so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory..."

What this material introduces here is that, at least for Paul, his sense of apostleship included the notion that his work of church planting was to be focused in areas where there were no Christians or existing churches. These verses do not imply that everyone in these places was a Christ follower, but rather that in Paul's understanding of his commission, the presence of churches in a setting meant that he could move on to do his work preaching the good news in a place where Christ was not known and the church not yet planted.

### **The Holy Spirit guided their work**

Finally, the record also makes it apparent that Paul's desire to go where the church did not exist was not simply carried out in a mechanistic fashion. Luke shows us that Paul was moved out of Jerusalem through divine direction (Acts 22:17-21). Later Acts 16:6-10 shows how Paul is directed by the Spirit not to preach in Asia or Bithynia, but instead moved to Troas where he received the vision calling him to Macedonia. Bruce notes that "Paul's missionary journeys display an extraordinary combination of strategic planning and keen sensitiveness to the guidance of the Spirit of God, however that was conveyed—by prophetic utterance, inward prompting, or the overruling of external circumstances."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 306.

## **Apostles and Missionaries: The Challenge of Terminology**

The purpose of this biblical overview was to examine what apostles did and how they viewed their work. Noting the way that scholars tend to use the term “missionary” in their definition of apostle, I intentionally set that aside in this exercise. The biblical data shows that they served, and here I borrowed a phrase from Rengstorf, as the “bearers of the New Testament message”. They proclaimed the Good News about Jesus through the power of the Spirit; were led by the Spirit, with miracles, signs, wonders, and healings confirming this proclamation; and organized those they won into local churches. They taught and modeled to these churches a concern for the weak, and in carrying out their ministry they suffered for the sake of Jesus’ name. I also made four observations about where apostolic work was carried out and how these decisions were made. They were pioneer church planters, making initial breakthroughs in places where Christ was not known. Within a fluidity where the Spirit could bring immediate guidance, they could see their work as being primarily located among a certain type of people. Paul’s sense of apostleship explicitly included going where Christ was not named and not building on another person’s foundation, and finally, his choices of ministry location were guided supernaturally by the Spirit.

The question now becomes, does the term “missionary” with its contemporary conception of crossing geographic and cultural boundaries fit well with the work of apostles in the New Testament? Let me make a few observations on this issue. First, in my estimation there is no perfect terminology. Because of the contextual nature of language, terms will always derive their meaning from current use. It is impossible for us in the twenty-first century to completely eliminate the history of usage and constellation of meanings that are associated with either apostle or missionary. It is incumbent on whoever would use these



terms to establish the ground rules for their use in advance and to clarify precisely what one means by the term.

Second, if we take the verbal root of apostle and missionary (*apostello* and *missio*) as sending and the nouns as those who are sent with a commission, you still have to fill in the content of what “sent ones” do and work around the historical content that each of these terms have picked up over the years.

Third, where you land on the emphasis of the work of apostles/missionaries seems to be more a matter of preference in understanding the text than in the actual biblical data. If you take apostle in its most generic sense as someone commissioned with a message (as Kostenberger does), then you can see the crossing of cultural boundaries to plant the church among people who have not heard as somewhat incidental to the concept. If, however, the Pauline notion of going where Christ is not named is foregrounded, then the crossing of cultural boundaries inherent in discipling the *ethne* and being witnesses to the ends of the earth becomes a central concept in the idea of apostleship.

What this means is that the term “missionary” then takes its meaning from the definition of apostleship in use. If you take the most generic sense of apostle, then the missionary is a church planter and there is no essential difference between this work within one’s own cultural setting and without. If, however, the cross-cultural and pioneer aspects of apostle are taken as primary, then there is a distinction between evangelism and cross-cultural evangelism. The work of a local church or apostle within his or her own sociocultural setting is evangelism while the pioneer work of planting the church in cultures where Christ is not known becomes cross-cultural evangelism or missionary work.

## **Apostolic Function Is A Heuristic That Defines For Us What, Why, And How We Work**

The terminology problem is not something easily solved. While theologians continue to grapple with the biblical texts, mission practitioners can benefit greatly from what we do know about apostolic ministry. I began this presentation by pointing out that our current understanding of missionary identity was inadequate to the challenges of our mission realities and that we need a more sophisticated and nuanced view of missions that can differentiate between places where the church exists and where it does not and mobilize the church to proclaim Christ where He is not yet known.

I believe that our current understandings about missions and the role of the missionary can be invigorated by rooting our sense of identity in the notion of apostleship. This does not mean that I am suggesting there is some kind of one-to-one mapping of the biblical data to our practice now. Rather, it is taking how apostles function in a heuristic fashion and infusing our work with that same vision. I am using "heuristic" here in the sense of an interpretive rubric for helping us to understand what we do, why we do it, and how we operate. By apostolic function I mean that at both the level of the individual cross-cultural worker, the mission team, and the sending agency, there is a focus on the apostolic task of preaching the Gospel where it has not been heard, planting the church where it does not exist, and leading people to the obedience of faith so that they, too, will express Jesus Christ in their social worlds and participate in God's global mission. It is a catalytic and comprehensive function that shapes cross-cultural work so that whatever local expression it may take, the ultimate goal is to see the church planted where it does not exist and to see local bodies of believers become fully obedient to Christ and missional themselves. Note that I am not saying we are

apostles; that is not something we choose, for it is God who gives apostles to the body of Christ.<sup>54</sup> It is functioning in an apostolic fashion, embracing individually and corporately the vision of performing the Pauline task of missiological breakthrough whether by doing it themselves, doing it in conjunction with a national church movement, or equipping a national church movement to do it on their own.

Missionary identity rooted in the idea of apostolic functions rescues cross-cultural work from becoming redundant because it reorients the entire purpose of the enterprise to God's passion to be worshipped by all the peoples, tribes, and tongues of His world. There is always an edge, an ear turned to the Spirit to seek out those who have never heard. No job can be done in a perfunctory manner and no task is insignificant because when we are functioning apostolically it embeds all work in the larger picture of bringing good news to social settings where it is not known.

Apostolic function as missionary identity takes on paradigmatic status because it acts as a master rubric for all that we do. It covers why we do missions (for the sake of His name), where we do it (where Christ is not known), what we

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<sup>54</sup>Earlier I noted that, in the view I am taking, the function of an apostle is something ongoing in the body of Christ. The theological rationale for this idea is found in Kirk who sees a unity in all the New Testament distinctions about apostleship in the special call of Christ and the apostolic mission of proclamation and church planting (Kirk: 262). Both Schmithals and Schnackenburg hold views of apostleship that allow for either a missionary function without seeing an ongoing apostolic office (Schmithals, 35) or apostleship based in the idea of "successful missionary activity, which was possibly confirmed by 'signs of an apostle,' powerful preaching and proof of authority" (Schnackenburg, 301). I believe that God does still commission people to be apostles as a function and which approaches the sense of office that we see "coalescing in Paul" to use Fees phrase. My point here is that I also think it is possible for cross-cultural workers and their teams to conceive of their work as to function apostolically even when they may not have the same type of commissioning and gifting as some do.

do (proclaim Christ and plant churches that live under God's rule), and how we do it (by the leading and power of the Spirit, with signs and wonders confirming the Word). In the section that follows, I will explain the idea of apostolic function in further detail and examine its impact on missionary endeavors.

### **Apostolic function means there are some things we choose not to do**

Apostolic function directly assails the problem observed by Neill that when everything is missions, nothing is missions. It is an intentionally narrow view of missions. Listen to Paul in I Corinthians 1:17: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." This verse lies near the beginning of a very complex section running from 1:10 to 4:21 where division is merely a symptom and the underlying problem has to do with the nature of the Gospel, the church, and apostolic ministry.<sup>55</sup> Fee points out that Paul is not denigrating in any way baptism, but rather the expression of his calling in a negative fashion is dictated by the nature of the argument he is making.<sup>56</sup> Fee reconstructs the setting for this section as most likely being a situation where Christian teachers are seen as purveyors of divine wisdom and the Christian faith is seen as an expression of wisdom (*sophia*). Corinthian presuppositions about both baptism and the use of "words of human wisdom" led them to call attention to the agency and

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<sup>55</sup>Fee, 50. See pages 46-66 for Fee's reconstruction and exegesis of this section and specifically 1:10-25.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 63. "Paul does not by any means depreciate baptism as such, as is shown in numerous passages in his epistles where he speaks of the significance of baptism, but only leaves it for his fellow workers to perform." Schmithals, 55.

status of the minister<sup>57</sup> and thus, as Fee points out, looking at leaders from this human perspective made both Paul and the Gospel look poorly.<sup>58</sup> Paul argues from being an apostle—a sent one of Christ—that what he was sent to do was proclaim the Good News, which draws attention to God and not the agent.<sup>59</sup>

What I want to highlight here is Paul's understanding of the work of an apostle as focused on "gospelizing;" it carries the sense of being very narrow and focused. He does not do everything, there are priorities that drive him as an apostle. I have already noted Romans 15:20, 23 and II Corinthians 10:16 that illustrate Paul's understanding of the apostolic task was not simply to proclaim the Good News, and plant local churches, but to actively seek out neglected regions where Christ was not yet known. My question is, if Paul were with us today, where the Church exists so powerfully in so many settings and is so weak or non-existent in other settings, is it not possible that he might develop another ad hoc argument like he did in I Corinthians presentation 1? In Corinth it concerned the nature of the Gospel, the church, and apostolic ministry,<sup>60</sup> but today it concerns the very nature of what missions and the missionary task is all about. I can see Paul arguing again that he does not do certain things and does not go certain places, because that is not what he was sent to do. Paul's letters to his churches are filled with exhortations based in our new relationship with Christ about what believers are to

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<sup>57</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 142-145.

<sup>58</sup>Fee, 49.

<sup>59</sup>See also Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary of First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1977) and David E. Garland, 1 Corinthians, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003) on this verse.

<sup>60</sup>Fee, 50.

do both within and without their own fellowship. Yet the overall picture we see is that Paul left the Christians within their own social setting to lead the charge while he himself got on with the task of preaching Christ where He is unknown.

### **Apostolic function means that all evangelism is not equal**

One of the weaknesses of the “everything is mission” view is that there becomes no way to differentiate between people who are not Christians and their relative need to hear the gospel.<sup>61</sup> Immediately this kind of “prioritizing” language raises red flags and an extreme sense of discomfort to all who affirm John 3:16 that God so loved the world. We know that God is not willing that any should perish (II Peter 3:9) and that He desires all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4-5). At the same time, all have sinned and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24). Theologically we affirm that all people are spiritually lost in an equal sense, no matter where you are from in the world geographically or what religious system you adhere to. When you are not reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, you are in a state of lostness. A person cannot be more lost spiritually than another person. In this sense, all evangelism is equal and there is equal priority and urgency.

Yet, I want to argue that there is another sense in which people are “lost” in different ways. I illustrate it in this fashion. “Why are the non-Christians Irem, a Turk, Ahmet, a Banjar and Tin Sau, a Bama, lost in a way that the non-Christians John in Springfield, Missouri, José in Costa Rica

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<sup>61</sup>In my own context in North America it is a very common experience for people within our mission organization to have church members and family argue against working cross-culturally because of all the spiritual need that we are surrounded with at home. This illustrates my point exactly because if there are non-Christians here and non-Christians somewhere else, then the argument is, why go somewhere else, just work here.

and Sun Yung in South Korea are not lost?” If all six of these people are equally lost theologically, what other perspective is there to consider? Before I provide an answer, let me review a Pauline perspective that is important to my notion of apostolic function. I have already noted the statements Paul makes in Romans 15:19, 20, and 23. In light of contemporary missionary practice, they are really quite remarkable. He says that he has fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum and that there is no longer any work for him in these regions. It becomes quite obvious that *for Paul* to “fully proclaim” the gospel is something less than either personally preaching to every single person or seeing every single person become a follower of Christ. His argument is that because he has fully proclaimed Christ and there are others who have laid a foundation as well, it is now time for him to go on to Spain.

In this scenario, Paul is very clearly and explicitly showing that in his apostolic work all evangelism is not equal and that there are priorities for him that mean moving from one setting where there are spiritually lost people to another setting. Paul’s sense of calling to preach Christ where He was not known (Romans 15:20) is based on the fact that there were already local churches in existence. What this strongly implies is that in Paul’s mind there is a distinction between the ongoing evangelistic mandate of local congregations who are to reach those proximate to them both geographically and culturally and the apostolic work of crossing geographic and cultural boundaries to go where Christ is not yet known. Thus, it is not a matter of every person in a place having yet heard the gospel or becoming a believer, but rather that the potential exists for them to meet Christ through near-neighbor witness.

The answer then to the question I posed above is that Irem, Ahmet, and Tin Sau live in sociocultural settings where there are no Christians or very few, thus there is not even the potential for hearing the Gospel. By way of contrast, for John, José, and Sun Yung, although they are lost as well,

there is potential for them to hear the Gospel because powerful indigenous church movement exists in their culture. *It becomes an issue of access; while all people are equally lost, not all people have equal access to the Gospel.* This idea of there being some basis for a differentiation between the evangelistic work of local congregations and the apostolic band fits well and is actually an extension of the distinction that is observed in the New Testament between church structures, which are “admirably suited to carry out the task of mission in the local context” and what we see in Acts 13-28 where “the expansion of the Christian movement was achieved through a strikingly different structure—the apostolic team or mission structure.”<sup>62</sup>

Apostolic function means that there is a different priority for the mission band. It does not mean that some people are less important or more important in terms of evangelism, rather each structure, local church and mission team, has its own sphere of work that must be pursued. This is a helpful concept because it helps us in our contemporary situation to address the access issue for the unreached, without pitting the spiritual need of non-Christians where there are church movements against those who live where there are no such near-neighbor witnesses. All non-Christians equally need to hear the message of Christ, but it is the priority of local church structures to reach those in their sphere and the unique contribution of the mission team, functioning in apostolic fashion, to seek out by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to those who do not yet have access to the gospel. Again, I think Paul's statements about going where Christ is not known and not building on another's foundation means that, were he assessing the missiological terrain today, he would rejoice in the powerful indigenous churches that exist in many settings and focus his efforts on going to sociocultural settings where the church is non-existent or a tiny, enclaved minority.

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<sup>62</sup>Glasser and others, 300.



## **Apostolic function does not limit God's sovereignty in calling**

The distinction between evangelism in a mono-cultural setting through the work of a local church and the apostolic function of crossing a cultural boundary to preach Christ where no church movement exists does not mean that there is a concretized taxonomy that must be rigidly followed and mechanistically applied to all ministry. Although Scripture can say that Peter was apostle to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles, Peter is replaced as head of the Jerusalem church by James, the brother of Jesus, and disappears from the record in Acts after presentation 12 except for his defense of Paul in presentation 15. He is in Antioch (Galatians 2:11), possibly Corinth (I Corinthians 1:12) and is associated with the church in Rome. It appears that Peter worked in situations with mixed congregations of both Jew and Gentile and in places where the church already existed. Paul, on the other hand, deliberately sought out situations to pioneer churches.

In all of our thinking about missions, we must submit to the sovereign guidance of God. We need to continually keep in our perspective that “the Spirit is the primary agent of mission, and human beings are secondary.”<sup>63</sup> It is clear that God calls people to apostolic ministry to work among their own people group, and calls others to work cross-culturally. There will also be times when the Spirit calls people to work in a cross-cultural setting in an apostolic fashion to awaken an already existing church movement. The Lord of the Harvest will also place workers in cross-cultural settings to serve the Body of Christ with their unique gifts in that particular place. What always needs to be kept in mind is that God works through the whole church in extending His rule and this involves many dimensions and a plurality of giftings that He distributes as He wills. God, who

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 262.

placed the capacity for culture inside of us as humans, is not bound by any system when it comes to placing his servants.

With that as background, what then is the benefit of the notion of apostolic function? It serves as a reminder and check to cross-cultural workers that they must be very clear in their role. If they are working in a role that a local Christian can do, the idea of apostolic function will query that decision. Apostolic ministry to an already existing church body naturally makes itself known through the fruit of the ministry in converts, churches planted and signs and wonders. For those who assert they are called cross-culturally to serve a local church movement and are doing ministry that is redundant to that of local believers, an apostolic function viewpoint will want to test that calling or help such a worker reorient themselves to a catalytic role as part of an apostolic team.

### **Apostolic function requires teams with a multiplicity of giftings**

One of the biggest objections to a view of missionary identity based in apostolic function is that it problematizes the labors of cross-cultural workers whose ministry is among strong indigenous church movements. I have already noted that the vast majority of cross-cultural workers are located in places where the church already exists and are in supportive not pioneering church planting type roles. The whole notion of apostolic function can be very unsettling to individual cross-cultural workers and their agencies. They often feel as if their work is devalued by such thinking. While apostolic function does challenge all cross-cultural workers and their agencies and has the potential to reorient their work, it actually is supportive of currently deployed workers and sees their labors as having the potential to be very strategic. In this section, I will expand upon some key ideas relating to apostolic function as it relates to those who are already working cross-culturally.

First, in keeping with the nature of the apostolic bands of the New Testament, apostolic function is best seen as operating corporately in a group rather than as the work of a single individual. What follows immediately upon this is the reality that the extremely difficult and complex work of proclaiming the Gospel, gathering disciples into churches, and training leadership so that an indigenous church movement can be formed where one did not previously exist is a work that demands all the gifts in the body. The body metaphor used by Paul in I Corinthians 12:12-26 is just as true for the mission team as it is for the local church. Apostolic function does not mean that everyone has the same giftings, but rather, as a heuristic, it shapes the identity of the entire team. The team's work has apostolic goals and values while at the same time the individual members are operating in their variety of gifts.

In a practical sense, when a mission team is working with apostolic function as its identity, what each worker actually does may continue to be the same—printing, media, teacher training, Bible school teaching, curriculum development, children's ministry, training youth leaders—but the reason for each activity is radically altered. Each worker shapes their labor around the ultimate apostolic goal of bringing the believers, local churches, and the entire national church movement they are working with and among to embrace the vision of reaching not only every person in their sociocultural setting, but of taking the Gospel to places where it has never been. Not only is the reason behind the work changed, how it is accomplished is also fundamentally reordered. In apostolic function each worker is in a catalytic role of making sure that cross-cultural evangelism does happen among the least-reached as all their efforts are bent in this direction and with this ultimate goal. Thus, the missionary team working where an initial Pauline breakthrough has already happened can embody apostolic function by challenging and modeling to the national church to step out into settings where such breakthroughs are need,

and teaching and training that national church to send their own cross-cultural workers to places where no church movements exist.

### **Apostolic function does not require redeployment**

Following right on the heels of my last point about the problematizing of cross-cultural work where the church exists is the jump to the wrong conclusion that apostolic function requires the redeployment of veteran workers to places where the church is not planted. Stirring up apostolic function does not mean redeploying already existing cross-cultural workers, but rather bending their expertise, giftings, and passion so that a church movement in all of its parts can be mobilized for both evangelism in its sociocultural setting and cross-cultural evangelism. In his presentation to the Evangelical Mission Society in 1991, Winter is adamant that the most strategic thing in reaching the unreached is not mass redeployment of existing missionaries or mass diversion of new missionaries going out from the West.<sup>64</sup> Rather, the most strategic work is for the existing missionary force to gain a new perspective, that which comes from people group thinking, so that they are:

...making sure that prayed into and breathed into everything they do is a new vision for the so-called younger churches to get involved in their own mission sending. That means national churches sending out evangelists not only to their own people but training up pioneer missionaries with the special skills to go to truly frontier people groups.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Ralph Winter, "Are 90% of Our Missionaries Serving in the Wrong Places?," *Mission Frontiers Bulletin*, (1991): 35.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

It is my observation that for local Christians and leaders their vision of those who need the Gospel is so constrained by those who are close to them geographically and culturally that when they finally do grasp a peoples lens it is very common to have a strong reaction to the reality that most cross-cultural workers are present among groups with large numbers of Christians. Unfortunately, they often move from this new concept to policy by dropping support for workers in such areas and advocating redeployment of such workers. Winter's comment is appropriate here: "I actually believe that the achievement of a true missiological breakthrough into a new culture is often grossly underestimated as to its complexity."<sup>66</sup> This thought cuts both ways in that veteran cross-cultural workers are best suited towards continuing to work in their area of expertise to bring the churches they work with full cycle into mission vision and sending. On the other hand, the complex work of bringing breakthrough in a new culture is better taken on at the front end of a career so that there is adequate time after the initial learning curve to labor. It is unrealistic to think that people who have learned one cultural setting can simply jump to another and suddenly be effective in the complex circumstances of planting the church where it does not exist.

### **Apostolic function solves the problem of redundancy**

The previous two points both deal with the issue of the reason for, the type, and method of accomplishment of cross-cultural workers who labor among already existing church movements. What apostolic function does is to problematize all three of these and challenge such workers to align their work with the vision of seeing disciples made among all the *ethne*. The question that I want to address expands upon my last point: "If apostolic function does not

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<sup>66</sup>Ralph Winter, "Advancing Strategies of Closure: From Mission to Evangelism to Mission," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 19, no. 4 (2002): 7.

call for the massive redeployment of cross-cultural workers from places where the churches exists to where it does not, what are those workers to do in the current locations?”

Let me start by reiterating what the focus of apostolic function is for participants in God’s mission. It is the continual impulse, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to take the message of Christ from where the faith is rooted into places and peoples where it is unknown and plant churches that are obedient to Jesus Christ in their social setting. When a missions movement (by movement I mean all of the participants from local Christians, churches, the agency and its workers) has its identity shaped by this idea of apostolic function all of their work is rooted in the larger goal of bringing glory to God through developing worshipping communities among the *ethne*. What is implicit here and which has been often neglected by mission agencies is that the churches developed also must share this same sense of apostolic identity and embrace their role in the mission of God to also take the Gospel across the frontiers of faith to those who have never heard.<sup>67</sup>

This means that every single effort and all giftings of all the participants are bent towards this task, and there is an intentional focus upon passing on the spiritual heritage of Scriptural understanding, sensitivity to the Spirit, and apostolic vision. Cross-cultural work done in such a fashion is purposeful and conducted in a way to move towards these ultimate goals, rather than the good, but subordinate concerns of establishing a group of Christians in a particular social setting. Alan Hirsch has coined the term “apostolic genius” that comes very close to the heart of the idea that I am calling apostolic function. His comparison is from the

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<sup>67</sup>“Protestant missions, being modality-minded, have tended to assume that merely modalities, e.g., churches, need to be established. In most cases where mission work is being pursued by essentially semi-autonomous mission sodalities, it is the planting of modalities, not sodalities, that is the only goal.” Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemptive Mission,” 228.

fields of biology and genetics where DNA codes for genetic information pass on traits and are a self-replicating material. His notation for the spiritual concept is mDNA (where m stands for missional and thus is the spiritual analog of the biological version). He uses it “to explain why the presence of a simple, intrinsic, reproducible, central guiding mechanism is necessary for the reproduction and sustainability of genuine missional movements.”<sup>68</sup> In his metaphor, it is mDNA that codes for Apostolic Genius into the believing community, which is “the life force that pulsated through the New Testament church.”<sup>69</sup> He defines it in this way:

Apostolic Genius, to my mind, is the total phenomenon resulting from a complex of multiform and real experiences of God, types of expression, organizational structures, leadership ethos, spiritual power, mode of belief, etc. And it is the active presence, or lack of it, that makes all the difference to our experience of Jesus community, mission, and spiritual power.<sup>70</sup>

It is a constellation of six elements which includes the lordship of Jesus at its heart, the missional-incarnational impulse, disciple making, a sense of comradeship and communality he calls *communitas*, organic systems, and apostolic environment.<sup>71</sup>

Hirsch notes that apostolic ministry is a function not an office and has at its core being the “custodian of Apostolic Genius and of the gospel itself.”<sup>72</sup> For Hirsch, the three

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<sup>68</sup>Hirsch, 76.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 78-79. The bulk of his book, *The Forgotten Ways*, examines in detail each of these six elements.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 153.

primary functions of apostolic ministry are advancing the gospel into new contexts and embedding the spiritual DNA into the new churches, ensuring these new churches remain true to the gospel and its ethos through applying and integrating apostolic theology, and creating an environment where other ministries emerge.<sup>73</sup> Hirsch's work with the idea of Apostolic Genius catches both the sense of the ethos to take the gospel to those who have never heard and the transmission of that ethos or spirit to the new emerging churches and movements that is inherent in what I am calling apostolic function for cross-cultural workers.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 155-159.

<sup>74</sup>The difference between what I am developing as apostolic function and Hirsch's work lies in my more specific emphasis on cross-cultural workers and their application of the apostolic spirit which seeks out not simply non-Christians, but those who have no near-neighbor witness in their social setting. That element is in my mind the vital link to retaining a New Testament view of mission and is a key criterion for evaluating a given missiology. If there is no ability in a missiology to deal with the issue of access and if it does not explicitly help those who hold it to seek out those who do not have access to the gospel, then it misses not just an element but what is the driving force behind apostolic ministry. Lord's development of a holistic charismatic missiology is an excellent example of wonderful work that provides a clear and compelling framework for mission. Andrew Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Missiology* (Milton Keynes, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 2005). He summarizes it as being holistic in terms of content, outworkings, agency and life (135). "The content of mission includes evangelism, healing, and social, reconciling and ecological action" carried out by individuals and communities "as they embrace a spirituality for mission that affects the whole of life" (Ibid.) The problem with the book and the proposed missiology itself is that it never explicitly deals with where or among whom this mission is carried out and, thus, it misses a critical part of the apostolic heart. Hirsch's work is focused on developing missional churches in the Western setting; he does broach the subject of cultural distance and the need for reaching those who are truly outside the faith (Hirsch, 56-63). However, with his primary framework being the church in Western cultural settings, he does not explicitly probe the implications of Apostolic Genius for planting the church in sociocultural settings where it does not exist at all. It is clear,



This discussion now makes it quite clear that there is a world of difference between the work done by a Christian from one social setting who crosses a cultural boundary and does something that a local Christian in the new social setting is doing, can do, or should be doing, and the labor embodied in transmitting Apostolic Genius to a church movement. Crossing geographic/cultural boundaries and in essence functioning as a local Christian, is, from the perspective of apostolic function, redundant work. I need to repeat here that I am not saying this is a bad thing, or that it is not a valuable contribution, or that it is not something that local Christians are very glad they do not have to do and are getting done for free. I also am not implying that the Holy Spirit would never call and equip people to serve in such a way. With all of those caveats in place, what I am saying is that from the perspective of apostolic function, there is a unique role to be played by cross-cultural workers who see their primary identity and function tied to planting churches and church movements that have apostolic spiritual DNA that transcends doing what local Christians can do.

An identity based in apostolic function may change the actual work a person does, it may alter the content to a degree in what they do, or it may change the reason why they are doing it. In order to make this more concrete, I want to illustrate with one specific point that is a major part of cross-cultural work, the teaching role. Many missionaries among existing church movements are involved in some kind of teaching of the Bible at a variety of levels ranging from small groups, to local churches, to lower-level ministerial training up to the graduate level. What happens when we look at the teaching role through the lens of apostolic function? Because in this frame the issue is developing churches that share the same vision, the role of the cross-cultural worker is cast as one who catalyzes,

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though, that the logic of his notion of Apostolic Genius requires the planting of churches where Christ is not known.

facilitates and transmits this kind of spiritual DNA. The first question then becomes whether or not the teaching is redundant? Could a local Christian do this same work?

Let me run through two scenarios. In the first, suppose that the answer to this question is no. This means that there is a vital role for the cross-cultural worker to fulfill by teaching and training to bring this church movement to maturity, obedience to the commands of Jesus, and participation in God's mission. This would form the explicit context of whatever the particular teaching content was, and should be communicated to the recipients so they in turn can pass this on to others. In the second scenario, suppose that the answer to the question is yes, this work is indeed redundant. Does this necessarily mean that I, as a missionary, need to stop teaching? Absolutely not! It does mean that there are further questions to ask of the situation. The question that the idea of apostolic function raises for any existing church movement is where are they at in terms of their own understanding and practice of apostolic function? If a church movement lacks Hirsch's notion of "apostolic genius" then the critical role for cross-cultural workers is to teach, train, and model so that this happens. Particular content needs to be wrapped in the broader context of the *missio Dei* and the goal of making disciples among all the peoples of the earth.

Ultimately, determining whether work is redundant or not is an issue that the primary participants in the mission (which would include the sending agency, the worker and team and the local churches and leadership of the receiving body) need to ascertain through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If a person's calling is confirmed by all these parties as being important to that body and they sense the leading of the Holy Spirit in this matter, it is not an issue. However, the vision of apostolic function and the role of passing on that kind of spiritual reproductive material to the receiving church are never going to have a negative impact on a church movement. It is a stance that will continually

challenge the cross-cultural worker to evaluate their labor and maintain a humble posture of seeking the Spirit's guidance about when that spiritual DNA is rooted and to step back and let local people take the lead at a given point.

### **Apostolic function provides a way to link the planting of the church with the demonstration of Christian social concern.**

I have no doubt that if the Lord delays his return that within a few more decades Christians who take the Bible seriously will look back upon the vast amount of energy expended on writing and debating the issue of the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility as a bump in the road of church history. The days of solid conceptual walls between church planting and Christian social concern, as if they in some way embraced two separate worlds that thus had to be sorted out as to their priority and relationship, is now mercifully nearly behind us. The amount of quality theological writing on the subject of God's concern for humans as wholes has laid to rest, at least in scholarly levels, the need to argue for some kind of bifurcation between caring for people spiritually and physically.<sup>75</sup> God loves people, and people have stomachs,

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<sup>75</sup>The following works provide an overview of some of the theological and practical work on Christian social concern. Miriam Adeney, *God's Foreign Policy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984); B Bradshaw, *Bridging the Gap: Evangelism, Development and Shalom* (Monrovia: MARC, 1993); Donald P. Brandt, "The Poor and the Lost: A Holistic View of Poverty," *Missiology: An International Review* 23, no. 3 (1995); Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); Jayakumar Christian, "The Powerlessness of the Poor: Toward an Alternative Kingdom of God Based Paradigm for Response" (Ph.D, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1994); Jayakumar Christian, *God of the Empty-Handed: Poverty, Power and the Kingdom of God* (Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications, 1999); Graham Cray, "A Theology of the Kingdom," in *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel*, ed. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Irvine, CA: Regnum, 1999); Murray W.

and children they love, and are entwined in economic and power relationships; they need shelter and care when they

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Dempster, "Evangelism, Social Concern and the Kingdom of God," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991); Murray W. Dempster, "Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective: Reformulating Pentecostal Eschatology," *Journal for Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993); Murray W. Dempster, "A Theology of the Kingdom--A Pentecostal Contribution," in *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel*, ed. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Irvine, CA: Regnum, 1999); Gary A. Haugen, *Good News About Injustice: A Witness of Courage in a Hurting World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999); Paul Hertig, "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversals of Fortunes," *Missiology: An International Review* 26, no. 2 (1998); Veli-Matti Karkkainen, "Are Pentecostals Oblivious to Social Justice? Theological and Ecumenical Perspectives," *Missiology: An International Review* 29, no. 4 (2001); Craig Keener, "God Cares About People: A Pentecostal Perspective from Luke/Acts," *Enrichment*, (2004); Peter Kuzmic, "The Church and the Kingdom of God: A Theological Reflection," in *The Church: God's Agent for Change* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1986); Robert C. Linthicum, *Empowering the Poor: Community Organizing Among City's Rag, Tag, and Bob Tail* (Monrovia: MARC, 1991); Robert C. Linthicum, *Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference in Your Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Darrow Miller, *Discipling Nations* (Seattle, WA: YWAM, 1998); Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999); Douglas Petersen, *Not by Might nor by Power: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern* (Oxford/Irvine, CA: Regnum Books International, 1996); Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, eds. *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel* (Irvine, CA: Regnum, 1999); Ron Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology of the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999); Ron Sider, *Just Generosity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999); Tom Sine, *Mustard Seed Vs. Mcworld: Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999); Valdir R. Steuernagel, "Social Concern and Evangelization: The Journey of the Lausanne Movement," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, (1991); Chris Sugden, *Gospel, Culture and Transformation* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2000); Howard Synder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977); Adeyemo Tokunboh, "Conflicting Options for Evangelicals," in *In Word and Deed*, ed. Bruce J. Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985).

are sick. At its coarsest form, (which thankfully most missionaries happily ignored) the kind of Gnostic split between spirit and body that legitimized saving the soul while completely ignoring the physical realities people live in and with is now seen in its proper historical context as reflecting issues in the intellectual world of the west at a certain period that were never a problem for everyone else.

In 1981, Jim Wallis wrote, “The goal of biblical conversion is not to save souls apart from history but to bring the Kingdom of God into the world with explosive force; it begins with individuals but is for the sake of the world”<sup>76</sup> He contrasted the segments of the church, which generally cohere around the issue of biblical authority, where some want to see conversion while forgetting the ultimate goal, and others do Christian social action while forgetting the necessity of conversion.<sup>77</sup> He reminds both sides that they must recover the biblical meaning of conversion to Jesus Christ. In the evangelical/Pentecostal/charismatic (EPC) stream of Christianity, this kind of recovery of the broader notion of conversion and salvation as encompassing human individuals, but having impact on all human social relations and the entire creation is well under way.<sup>78</sup> The issues that

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<sup>76</sup>Jim Wallis, *The Call to Conversion* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1981), 8.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid. I like Wallis’ phrasing here because it avoids separating what should be inseparable. Sometimes among evangelicals the importance of the social impact of the gospel has been phrased as “no distinction between word and deed”. However, I find this to be just as bifurcating as those who would separate evangelism from social responsibility because it logically leads to “deeds” without words since this phrasing makes them appear separate rather than being intimately tied together. Thus, in reverse it compartmentalizes deeds away from the words that bring the interpretation of those very deeds.

<sup>78</sup>For examples of this kind of awareness see McGee; in his work on developing a charismatic missiology Lord includes ecological concerns; see Glasser’s section on Jesus and the poor where the coming of the Kingdom “is to provide a tangible manifestation of God’s attitude toward poverty and injustice” (Glasser and others, 216).

do remain concern the way in which we should work out on the ground in particular social settings all the will of God as it regards bringing reconciliation to people and seeing His rule extended in social relationships.

In my estimation the two most critical issues in missions lie in addressing the two massive imbalances that exist in our world in light of the commission that our Lord gave us to make obedient disciples among the *ethne*. The first is the imbalance that exists in where the church is planted and the nearly 40% of humanity that lacks adequate near-neighbor witness. This calls us to labor to root the gospel in human societies that have either no church planting movements or very small ones. The second is the imbalance that exists in material wealth, with a small minority of societies and segments of social systems enjoying personal affluence while the majority of the world struggles for literal survival across all the physical indicators that measure quality of life. This calls us to labor for the extension of God's rule to bring justice, peace, and provision through His new community to bless entire social systems.

While those in the EPC stream now increasingly recognize the comprehensiveness and unity of the mandate to labor for reconciliation and God's rule at the individual and societal levels, there is still the tendency to split this kind of work structurally into organizations that plant churches and organizations that do compassion, development, and work for justice. In some standard mission agencies, with broader concerns and commitments, Christian social action is present, but has an uneasy relationship to what is seen as the primary work of planting the church.<sup>79</sup> I have no difficulty with specialist organizations that band together around a

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<sup>79</sup>Sometimes this uneasy relationship is expressed in the necessity of framing all social activities in terms of how it either brought about conversions or set the stage in some way to prepare people for conversion. There is often a lack of theological integration as to how caring for people and working for justice relates to the coming of God's rule, conversion and the establishment of communities of faith.

single purpose. Those organizations have an important role in the body of Christ, but in this section I want to look at how the idea of apostolic function relates to standard mission agencies where Christian social action is part of a larger constellation of things that they do.

I believe that apostolic function as I have developed it in this presentation links together these two parts, planting the church and Christian social action, which get separated either into distinct organizations, or in the case of standard mission agencies, within the organization itself. We know from Scripture that God's concern holistically embraces the whole person—both individuals and social systems, personal and structural sin—yet, on the ground level of practice, we struggle with how to address these issues. Expressions of Christian social concern can end up being a kind of unwanted stepchild that is viewed suspiciously for eating up precious resources, or in its crassest form, becomes the “carrot on the stick” that draws people in so that we can get them properly converted. The fear becomes that evangelism will be eroded and overrun by the press of caring for physical needs.<sup>80</sup> However, the linkage that apostolic function brings provides a real-life ministry context that protects the proclamation of the gospel and requires God's people to act. This linkage rejects any kind of bifurcation of the spiritual and physical and the manipulative use of the material to pull in converts. Apostolic function is about planting the church; in the book of Acts we see the preaching of the good news resulting in a new community. This is what Jesus intended

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<sup>80</sup>McGee: 11. In my opinion, this fear is based on our penchant for constructing institutional answers that makes us fear pragmatism and money as the answer. As a missions agency, we need to remain wary of institutionalism and a naive view that simply throwing money from the West at the complex problems of poverty fulfills our duty and will solve the problem. Drive-by compassion, just as with drive-by evangelism, is a truncated version of the real thing, treating people as objects and imposing answers to problems generated from an outside perspective rather than from the perspective of the people purportedly being served.

and is what occupied the time and attention of the apostles. It was not just any church and we need to be careful not to read into the text our contemporary notion of a disparate group of individuals who gather once on Sunday. They planted churches with apostolic DNA, apostolic theology, and woven into that, as I have noted above, was a deep concern for those who were marginalized and physically impoverished. It is a church where Jesus is Lord and that works to extend that lordship in all of life and to make that confession bind people “to participate in the new social reality that the Holy Spirit was sending forth into the world.”<sup>81</sup>

Planting communities of redeemed people who are rooted in apostolic theology, living under and expressing the Lordship of Jesus Christ, committed to seeing His rule extend into their social setting, brings us face to face with the poor and social realities. It is in these relationships between and among God’s new people and His people as they interact with the world that shatters our ability to compartmentalize. The predication of an ongoing relationship makes the temporal relations of preaching and caring a moot point because in a relationship viewed as a whole you can be doing both all of the time, even though chronologically there are moments where you are proclaiming and moments where you are helping people. As Winter put it so memorably, when it is a case of family, you never would even think about choosing between evangelism and social action.<sup>82</sup> In a relationship, you do not have to

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<sup>81</sup> Glasser and others, 265.

<sup>82</sup>“In English, the word blessing implies merely a benefit—not also a relationship, as in the Hebrew *barak*. Americans—even American missionaries—typically do not understand the full significance of the privileges, obligations, and permanent benefits of the family relationship. Yet, a relationship of just this significance is implied in the Hebrew *barak*. The implications here are profound and exceed the normal intent of evangelistic appeals. For example, in a family relationship you do not choose between evangelism and social action” Ralph D. Winter, “Mission in the 1990’s: Two Views I. Ralph D. Winter,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* July (1990): 99.



make choices because you are there face-to-face over time and there is no fear that either caring or proclamation will be diminished, nor does one have to "set-up" the other. The relationship provides the context for the interpretation of any given deed. Where there is relationship, there is the ability to explain the "why" of the deed or for the deed to illuminate the proclaimed word.

One of the objections that could be leveled at the idea of apostolic function is that in a similar way that the emphasis on planting the church where it does not exist problematizes the function of missionaries working with already existing churches, the apparently narrow emphasis on planting the church versus doing many other things problematizes those who feel called to work primarily in Christian social action. I will begin by repeating what I have already stated above. Apostolic function is not a ministry framework that is applied mechanistically across all times and circumstances. It is the sovereign God who places his laborers where He wills and there is no doubt that He calls people to express His compassion and work for His justice in settings other than their birth culture. We never want to limit the work of the Holy Spirit in directing His servants into fields of labor.

However, having said that, I feel that apostolic function and its corporate sense of working as a team towards apostolic goals draws together in the team context what is often separated into the different functions of church planting and social concern. In a pioneer setting, the role of transmitting Apostolic Genius, to use Hirsch's term, needs those with a social concern vision and theological underpinning to help teach and model that so that it is an integral part of the identity of that new movement. The apostolic band needs all the giftings and those who are called to care, show compassion, and work for justice should be intimately connected with those planting the church. This kind of collaboration reminds church planters of the DNA issues in making sure that caring for the weak is part of the

soul of the new community. It also reminds workers in social action that it is not enough to develop institutional and programmatic answers, but rather that the rule of God must be lived out in and through the new community and flow to the broader society.

Finally, the catalytic and mobilizing role of apostolic function means that when an existing local church movement is missing any of the components of a true New Testament church, that apostolic DNA so to speak, then it is apostolic ministry to work among them to teach, model, demonstrate, and advocate for that element to become part of that movement. When church movements no longer reach people in their own sociocultural setting, when they have no vision and mechanism to do cross-cultural evangelism, when they do not care for the weak and marginalized, these conditions beg for a team functioning apostolically to come alongside and lovingly seek to bring them into the fullness of the experience of the church in the New Testament. Thus, while there may be people called to use their spiritual gifts in the area of Christian social concern cross-culturally, there will also be people called to fulfill an apostolic function in this regard by laboring to put the vision and practice of Christian social concern into the spiritual genetic material of a church movement.

## **Conclusion and Summary**

I began this presentation by arguing that we need a new sense of missionary identity in order to combat the fuzziness of pan-missionism and to galvanize the church to take the gospel to places where church movements do not exist. My proposal is that this new identity should be formed around the notion of apostolic function. By this term, I mean that cross-cultural work should be framed around the understanding that apostles had of their work and the actual kind of work that they did. After reviewing the biblical material on apostleship, I argued that apostolic function—

focus on the apostolic task of preaching the Gospel where it has not been heard, planting the church where it does not exist, and leading people to the obedience of faith so that they will express Jesus Christ in their social worlds and participate in God's global mission—should form the heuristic that defines our identity and practice. In the remainder of the presentation I examine seven themes that apostolic function relates to in the contemporary practice of missions.

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