

Introduction

BOOK THEME

We've become increasingly convinced that what the church needs to find its way out of the situation it's in at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not more faddish theories about how to grow the church without fundamentally reforming its structures.¹

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch

THERE IS NOTHING NEW with Frost and Hirsch's call for a reformation of church structures for the sake of the gospel. The Reformation, the Radical Reformation, and their offshoots are proof of that. It is a call that is presently reverberating around churches new and old. One answer that is being put forward in several different contexts is the need for churches to incorporate a charismatic apostolate. Charismatic apostles or the charismatic apostolate² are not the phrases necessarily used by popular writers who often refer to them simply as "apostles"; nevertheless, the assumption underlying all of the contemporary Charismatic/Evangelical accounts of modern apostles is that these are Spirit-empowered/reliant pioneering ministers whose vocation and ministry have their origin in God. This charismatic "gift"/"ministry"/"office" of apostle is not, in popular Evangelical/Charismatic conceptions, synonymous with ordained ministry. This calling and ministry *can* coincide with an official church position—such as bishop, priest, deacon, elder, superintendent, and so on—and many advocates would hope that it does—but it does not mean *de facto* that you are a charismatically gifted apostle. The evidence of what the person does indicates whether they are an apostle, not their title or position.

1. Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 6.

2. This is in keeping with Andrew Walker's use of the phrase "charismatic apostolate" in "Pentecostalism," 428–34.

Advocates of the charismatic apostolate believe that the apostle is a gift of Christ to his church for the sake of its maturity and mission; the Scripture undergirding this idea is Ephesians 4:11–13: “The gifts he gave were that some would be *apostles* [emphasis mine], some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” (NRSV)

As I will show this belief is not new, but there are novel aspects being promoted amongst modern charismatic apostolate advocates, and in light of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement it is a belief that has gained an extensive and international hearing.

One of the most popular arguments for why this ministry has become prominent recently is a Restorationist one. This is particularly the case with Peter Wagner, who claims that “just as the 1980s was a decade initiating the renewal of the biblical gift and office of prophet, the 1990s is shaping up to be the decade in which God is renewing the gift and office of apostle.”³ These are intriguing claims coming from a man who is renowned for observing current trends in the Evangelical world,⁴ and whose influence is widespread in that sector of the church. He, along with other Evangelical/Charismatic leaders, is convinced that God has been restoring⁵ charismatic apostles to the church. The claim is often made that God is doing something substantially new in restoring this apostolic company, and that this is a move of the Spirit, a “new thing”⁶ which the church must take note of—in essence this is the “new wine”⁷ that is being given to the

3. From Wagner’s foreword in Hamon, *Apostles*, xxii.

4. In their article on Wagner—“Wagner,” 1181—McGee and Pavia refer to him as “an authority on worldwide church growth.”

5. Although many of these leaders use the word “restore,” they usually believe that there are identifiable Charismatic apostles throughout the Church’s history. Therefore Wagner stipulates that “there has never been a time in Church history when the Church has been without apostles.” Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets*, 19.

6. “New thing” language is prominent in Charismatic circles, frequently used in connection with what the Spirit is apparently doing amongst God’s people. The idea is lifted from Isaiah 43:19: “See, I am doing a new thing.” (NIV).

7. Talk of “new wine” and “new wineskins” is popular in Charismatic circles. The idea is taken from Luke 5:37–8: “no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.” It is taken out of context to refer to the need for the work of the Spirit (the “new wine”) to be incorporated into church structures that can contain them (the “new wineskin”). It is usually used by Restorationist Christians who believe that God is restoring the church to its God-given pattern and

church which in turn must become the “new wineskin” to contain what God is currently giving. Aside from both the Restorationist reading, which is theologically problematic, and the unpersuasive fixating on a particular date (1990),⁸ is Wagner correct? Is there evidence for a shift in the Evangelical/Charismatic world that would justify such a statement? Is it really something “new”? If it is, what is new about it? What is not new about it? Is it a view consistent with Scripture and the traditions of the church? Is it something the wider church needs to incorporate—and if so what aspects can and should be embraced?

This idea that Christ is still giving apostles to his Body is a concept that has a checkered history within the church. It is a view that still meets formidable opposition within certain branches of the church due to theological and ecclesiological traditions related to both apostolic succession (the belief that the original apostles’ authority has been conferred to their successors the bishops) and cessationism (the idea that with the closing of the canon miraculous gifts and ministries died out as they were no longer needed).

Prior to the twentieth century there were minority Christian groups, often rejected and deemed heretical, that have advocated a charismatic apostolate. With the worldwide impact of the Pentecostal Charismatic Movement, that has changed—a marginal viewpoint has not only been widely accepted by participants in that movement,⁹ but even people from within other traditions have thought again on the topic and have been promoting similar beliefs and forms of ministry.¹⁰

My personal interest in this subject came out of a desire to make sense of my own encounter with claims about apostolicity being made by the Christian groups I had either been in or was involved with. As a Religious Studies teacher in a Catholic school I was encountering the view that for Roman Catholics apostolic succession was vital to the very being of the church, and the Anglican orders that I was contemplating taking were null and void. The conservative Evangelical circles I had been a part of were uninterested in apostolic succession and deemed an ongoing gift

power to highlight that the old denominations (the “old wineskins”) cannot contain the new works of the Spirit (the “new wine”).

8. All those involved in the British Restorationist House Church movement (e.g., Terry Virgo—still a prominent Charismatic leader in Britain; Bryn Jones—now deceased; and Dave Tomlinson—who has become a priest in the Church of England) claimed a similar thing but believed it was occurring far earlier than the 1990s.

9. See chap. 2 for evidence of this.

10. For a more detailed defense of this, see chap. 5.

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of apostle as unbiblical; whilst at various Charismatic conferences and churches I had attended, leaders were arguing that an ongoing charismatic apostolate was thoroughly biblical and God was evidently restoring this gift to the church. How was I to make sense of these conflicting accounts? This book is ultimately my answer to that question.

To comprehend the contemporary charismatic apostolate I decided I would have to work both as a historian and a theologian. As a historian my aim was threefold: first, to garner enough information to give a detailed snapshot of the contemporary scene with regards to the charismatic apostolate; secondly, to find and describe historical precedents of the phenomenon; and thirdly, to draw attention to historical factors that have led to the current situation—the thought being that in bringing these naturally intertwining areas together, it would be possible to locate, appraise, and make sense of the charismatic apostolate historically.

To theologically appraise the modern popular concepts of the charismatic apostolate I used the “adjudicators” that are appealed to within the traditions that have shaped me. As a result the theological lens worn was an Evangelical, catholic/ecumenical, Anglican perspective: Evangelical in that the Scriptures are given pride of place in determining the doctrines of the church, and therefore careful attention was given to biblical exegesis; catholic/ecumenical in that both the history and traditions (past and present) of the “whole” church and an ecumenical awareness were seen as important in interpreting Scripture and applying it within our present context. Historically, Anglicanism has looked to a third strand alongside Scripture and Tradition, that of reason. It is that which I have been using both in reviewing the other two strands of Scripture and tradition, but also in contemplating whether the contemporary charismatic apostolate is a genuine charism of the Spirit—for if it is, then it will inevitably be edifying to the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7).

An insight from Father Peter Hocken helped provide me with another lens through which to investigate this subject.¹¹ Using Paul’s argument in Romans 11 on how Jews and Gentiles should relate to one another in light of Christ, he argued that the older churches were akin to the Jews, and the new “stream” movements were akin to the Gentiles. Therefore, just as Paul had charged the Jews to recognize what God was doing amongst the Gentiles, so older churches need to embrace what God is doing in the newer movements; at the same time, just as Paul had warned the Gentiles from become proud and dismissive toward the Jews, so those part of these

11. Hocken, *Strategy*.

new “streams” need to refrain from becoming haughty and affirm where they have come from and not be dismissive of the treasures within the older churches. Simply put, both groups need each other. Applying this reasoning to this study: What theologies and practices occurring within charismatic groups concerning the charismatic apostolate could the older churches learn from and potentially embrace as a genuine charism of the Spirit? What could the traditions and history of apostolicity within the older churches teach these new movements, which could prevent them from embracing erroneous ideas that are detrimental to the health of the Body of Christ?

To help structure this exploration and appraisal¹² I have outlined this book using the following sections: 1) where we are in regard to the charismatic apostolate; 2) how we got here; 3) what we should make of it theologically/ecclesiologicaly; and 4) where the charismatic apostolate might go.

BOOK OUTLINE

Part 1: Where We Are

In chapter 1 a general outline of the older churches’ understanding of “apostolic ministry” is given, followed by a look at the present beliefs on the charismatic apostolate being endorsed by and found amongst churches/denominations in America that have been affected by the Pentecostal Charismatic Movement. This has involved looking not only at statements put forward by the denomination when available, but also what Renewal organizations are promoting in that denomination. I look in a systematic way at differing groups according to their primary influence—Pentecostal or Charismatic—and form of church—denominational or independent. This chapter demonstrates that the charismatic apostolate is a noticeable component of Charismatic churches in the USA.

In chapter 2 I follow a similar format in relation to the British church as well as look at general trends prominent in the British Charismatic “world” that have bearing on the charismatic apostolate. There is also an important, though brief, discussion concerning the similarities and differences between the American and British church’s attitude to and

12. This is not a claim for an authoritative explanation; however, I do offer a provisional yet substantial, retroductive explanation of the charismatic apostolate in relation to the disciplines of history and theology.

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fascination with the charismatic apostolate. This chapter shows that the charismatic apostolate is an explicit feature of many churches and has become prominent within the independent sector and amongst denominational Charismatics. The overarching aim of these two chapters is to give a broad picture of the current scene in regards to charismatic apostles. In chapter 3 I describe the theology and theory of modern apostles from the perspective of several renowned teachers in the Charismatic/Evangelical sector whose ministries are affecting churches internationally: Derek Prince, Kenneth Hagin, Terry Virgo, Mike Breen, and Peter Wagner. Background information on each of the teachers is provided, followed by a detailed unpacking of their understanding of the charismatic apostolate focusing in on what they see as the characteristics of this ministry and how the church both local and universal should relate to it. In this discussion the aspects which are common to each of these teachers are highlighted as well as ways in which they differ, and finally the types of charismatic apostolate being advocated are grouped into three sets. As a result this chapter provides an in-depth description of popular modern conceptions of the charismatic apostolate.

Part 2: How We Got Here

In chapter 4 the current scene of the charismatic apostolate is put into its historical context through tracing the charismatic apostolate over the course of the church's history up till circa 1990, highlighting (and debating—when appropriate) common beliefs being advocated concerning apostles in different eras and commenting on the success/failure of previous movements which have incorporated a charismatic apostolate. In chapter 5 I consider what is new and not new about the theologies and theories about modern charismatic apostles looked at in chapter 3 in comparison with the ideas and practices looked at in chapter 4. This is followed by a discussion of the possible stepping stones that have led to the widespread attraction of this new emphasis in the West, in particular Britain, making use of influential church leaders' testimonies¹³ as to why they have embraced belief in an ongoing charismatic apostolate alongside other factors which from my research I deem as significant. This involves a reflection on the impact of the Pentecostal Charismatic Movement, gift courses, Charismatic ecclesiologies, openness to the “prophetic,” technological

13. Rev Barry Kissell, Rev Bruce Collins, the Rt. Rev David Pytches, Colin Urquhart, Dr Michael Eaton, and Professor Peter Wagner.

advances, cultural changes and theological shifts in regards to missiology and apostolicity. This chapter collates evidence together in such a way that a possible explanation is given to why a minority perspective has become so widespread, and what contributes to its ongoing acceptance.

Part 3: What We Should Make of It

In chapter 6 I critically discuss the debate amongst Evangelicals concerning the Scriptural legitimacy of a charismatic apostolate. I do this by evaluating the arguments put forward by influential voices within Evangelicalism against modern conceptions of the charismatic apostolate, and critiquing the case for them made by a significant Pentecostal scholar. This discussion highlights the exegetical points of tension, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of both traditional arguments against an ongoing charismatic apostolate, and one of the strongest cases for it in light of New Testament scholarship on the individual texts. This chapter sets out the essential exegetical/hermeneutical issues that are at stake with any biblical argument for or against an ongoing charismatic apostolate. In chapter 7 I comment from an ecumenical perspective on the three main types of charismatic apostolate identified in chapter 3 and judge what might be helpful, scripturally justifiable and ecclesologically acceptable for the church's mission in Britain. It is within this context that the disputes with the charismatic apostolate based upon apostolic succession and cessationism are discussed in relation to scholarship and ecumenical considerations. This chapter therefore considers the wider ecclesiological issues that must be taken into account when evaluating the different types of charismatic apostolate.

Part 4: Where It Might Go

In chapter 8 there is a summation of my findings and an envisaging of the possible future of the charismatic apostolate in Britain which is done by positing the likely responses to the three types of charismatic apostolate across the denominational spectrum. The chapter concludes with a consideration of potential avenues for future research within this field, as well as a final word concerning the challenge that this historical and theological appraisal brings to the church.