

Joseph Mattera: Why the American Church Gets So Confused About Apostolic Ministry

One of the hallmarks of the charismatic movement is the realization that the gifts in the New Testament are still available today. As the Holy Spirit continues to stir up those gifts around the world, the church is also experiencing a restoration of the New Testament offices (see Eph. 4:11-13).

Unfortunately, some Christians use the term “apostle” flippantly, and because of that, many believers in America reject the term entirely. But Bishop Joseph Mattera says it’s important we understand the biblical foundation for apostolic ministry in our day. In an exclusive interview with Mattera for my new “In Depth With Stephen Strang” podcast, he told me Christians must discern the difference between the foundational apostles Jesus set into place and the apostolic function we see today. (Click [here](#) or scroll down to listen to my interview with Mattera.)

“The [apostles] Jesus chose in the early church—there will never be another group like that,” says Mattera, founding pastor of Resurrection Church. “They are the ones that the 12 gates, the pillars of the New Jerusalem, will be named after. That being said, there are functional apostles and a functional apostolate that has been going on since the original Twelve. As a matter of fact, the New Testament mentions about 70 people with the title or function ‘apostle.’ ... So I would contend that the ministry function, not the foundation, but the ministry function of apostle still continues.”

I find Mattera's insight fascinating because, growing up in a Pentecostal denomination, I never heard those terms. I was an adult before I met someone who carried the title of "apostle." But I've come to realize that even though I didn't see the term used often, I have met many people who indeed functioned as apostles.

The first who comes to my mind is my late father-in-law, Rev. Harvey D. Ferrell, who never called himself an apostle but planted churches all around the world. Perhaps the reason many avoided using that title is because it was so controversial in the body of Christ. Thankfully, the term "apostle" is not quite so controversial now, and Mattera says it's even less so when used as an adjective.

"Even many evangelical groups and church-planting movements are starting to use the term 'apostolic,' because they realize the pastoral paradigm is very inbred; it's not mission," he says. "It doesn't involve a lot of entrepreneurial endeavors and expansion, and it doesn't involve having a gospel movement. ... But the apostolic paradigm is missional in nature."

Because of this, Mattera says he doesn't even call himself an apostle, but has no problem using the phrase "apostolic" to describe himself and his ministry. And he certainly has a right to do so. Mattera not only founded Resurrection Church in Brooklyn, but he also has planted several sister churches and even leads the U.S. Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (USCAL).

But Mattera's work stretches beyond the U.S. The Irish-Italian New Yorker gave his life to Jesus at 19 years old in 1978, and within four months, he was preaching the gospel on subway trains and ferries.

"God was falling and just incredible things happened," Mattera says of that season. "Then I went to Bible school and after a

year, the Lord called me out of it. I went to Turkey during martial law in 1979 and went door to door getting Bibles into the hands of the Turks. It was illegal.”

After returning home from Turkey, he met and fell in love with his wife, Joyce. Eight months later, they married and used their wedding money to finance a six-week trip to the Soviet Union during the Moscow Olympics.

“And we preached in Leningrad, Kiev and Moscow,” he says. “We saw God move miraculously. We smuggled Bibles in. ... When I came back, it was so easy for me to preach because I was used to being chased by the KGB or being in the midst of a Turkish environment [that is] hostile against Christianity.”

But probably the most amazing revival Mattera has been a part of was when he and Joyce planted their first church in Sunset Park, New York.

“[The neighborhood] was so bad, they even made a movie about it,” he says. “We just started closing blocks off. I showed this [film] *The Cross and the Switchblade*, preached, and we saw whole blocks coming to Christ. It was like a Charles Finney book with revivals breaking out. And within 10 years, that whole community of 160,000—primarily Dominican and Puerto Rican Hispanics—it was totally transformed. Gang members either got saved, got killed or got thrown in jail. The abandoned buildings were gone, churches started to spring up, and we saw an amazing transformation. So a lot of what I preach has been informed by those early years.”

Experiences like these—along with intensive Bible study and deep prayer—have taught Mattera things that often learned theologians don’t fully understand.

“I’ve been invited by evangelical groups to give lectures; I’ve done a few seminars, and several of those seminars were attended by noncharismatic evangelical scholars and theologians,” he says. “And I’ve had incredible feedback, to

the point that they've said, 'We've never heard anything like this.' They say things like, 'I was mentored by'—and they name the top scholars of the 20th century—but I've never heard this.'"

With 78 percent of American Christians believing that Jesus was a created being—as Jehovah's Witnesses believe—Mattera says it's crucial that believers receive discipleship in the Word. One great key, he says, to balanced wisdom and deep theological understanding is actually very simple—a robust prayer life.

"It's not just a historical-grammatical hermeneutics method," he says. "It's also having a robust prayer life. ... Basically, I contend that the body of Christ is ignoring the great magisterium of the church. Jesus said, 'The Holy Spirit is there to teach us and to guide us.' And when we don't allow the fullness of the Spirit to work in our lives, we're actually bypassing the group teacher, and that's the Holy Spirit."

Mattera talks more in depth about this in his upcoming book *The Jesus Principle*, which is not available for sale quite yet, but you should keep your eye out for it in the near future. He also writes weekly blogs on theology, philosophy and cultural issues on his website, . And in case you haven't already subscribed to his "The Pulse" blog on , I encourage you to do so by clicking [here](#).

Ephesians 4:11-13 tells us that the purpose of New Testament offices—including apostles—is to equip the body of Christ so we can build each other up until we attain unity and the fulness of Christ. This hasn't fully happened yet, but as wise teachers like Mattera continue to preach truth and disciple leaders, I believe that day will come soon.

To listen to my entire interview with Mattera, be sure to click on my podcast below!